Serving the Gods: Artists, Craftsmen, Ritual Specialists in the Ancient World

Edited by Bernhard Schneider, Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider

Harrassowitz Verlag

Bernhard Schneider, Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider (Eds.)

Serving the Gods

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Bernhard Schneider,
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Special thanks are due to the members of our local institute in Wrocław who made this workshop possible. First of all, we want to extend our thanks to Professor Krzysztof Nawotka, Agnieszka Wojciechowska, and our local project manager Łukasz Szeląg for their help with organizational tasks and their always helpful advice. Also to mention here is Sebastian Fink, current chair of board of the Melammu project, who as well chaired a session. Thanks are also due to the other colleagues who volunteered as chairs (beside the editors of this volume), Zozan Tarhan and Agnieszka Wojciechowska. Last but not least, we are grateful for being accepted for publication at Harrassowitz Verlag and want to thank Stephan Specht and his team for the productive collaboration.

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Figure 1 : Participants of the workshop in Wrocław ; behind (from left): Krzysztof Nawotka, Toon Sykora, Łukasz Niesiołowski-Spanò, Sebastian Fink, Alexis Szuster ; middle (from left) : Dilyana Boteva, Kiersten Neumann, Agnieszka Wojciechowska, Zozan Tarhan, Bernhard Schneider ; front (from left): Stevens Bernardin, Piotr Zadworny, Roosa Kallunki, Giorgio Paolo Campi, Nicolay Sharankov, Nicolas Samaretz, Erin Darby, Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider, Haggai Olshanetsky, Francesca Mazzilli, Piotr Głogowski (not in the image: Michal Schwarz, An Jiang, Carl-Loris Raschel).

Introduction and Structure of the Book

Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider, Bernhard Schneider

This book is a result of the 23rd Melammu Workshop held at the University of Wrocław on 26th and 27th September 2024. It also joins the contributions of those who could not make it to present their papers on-site (Bucci, Sivertsev, London and McLoughlin).

This volume is divided into two parts: Ancient History and Philology as Part I and Archaeology and Ethnography as Part II, consists of 16 contributions written by representatives of different areas of expertise on the ancient world. Within these parts, we chose to arrange the different chapters in alphabetical order to avoid creating any artificial clusters.

With a range of papers addressing various issues within the large topic of serving the gods, we want to understand the complex role of the workforce within the temples, including ritual actors as well as the involvement of political authorities and their impact on the religious services and functions. The chapters in this publication cover a broad range of areas ranging from Britain in the West to China in the East. The assembled evidence presented in this book studies the human factor within creating, administering and operating a diverse range of cultic places. We also explore the institutional side of worship and human resources requested for the running of the sanctuaries and cultic practices. The topic as it is presented within this volume was never an issue of broader study taking into consideration different ancient cultures.

This book does not pretend to be a comprehensive handbook to the subject, and we are aware of the complexity of the problem of defining the service paid to the gods. Our volume offers a series of essays showcasing a range of perspectives around the broad topic. It aims to serve as a stimulus to encourage further discussion in the cross-cultural approach.

The volume starts with a chapter introducing the overall topic of *Serving the Gods: Exploring the Human Resources of Ancient Temples*. It explains the chosen approach, taking into consideration the state-of-the-art and cross-cultural line towards understanding the idea of studying the manpower and organization of ancient temples understood as social, economic and religious institutions. It poses the question: WHO, together with the priests, was serving the gods? And some answers for this broad research question are provided by the following chapters in this volume.

In the following contribution 'Servants on Strike! Not Serving the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia' (Chapter 1), Sebastian Fink presents an antithesis of the overall topic, and as a reminder of the diversity of interdependencies in the relationship between humans and gods.

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The first part assembles 10 chapters with historical and philological focus, beginning with a paper of Stevens Bernardin, 'The Shepherds and the Cultic Process in the Phoenician World: A New Reading of the Phoenician Accounts of Kition' (Chapter 2). He tries to shed light on the position and religious role of shepherds in the Phoenician settlement on Cyprus. He bases his analysis on the textual evidence from Kition and as a *comparanda* he provides Ugaritic texts.

Chapter 3, 'The Non-Priestly Staff of the Jerusalem Temple in the Persian Period (Gatekeepers, *Netinim*, Sons of Solomon's Servants, Temple Singers)', by Giorgio Paolo Campi and Łukasz Niesiołowski-Spanò aims to analyze the "lower" staff of the Jerusalem Temple in the Persian Period (mid-5th century BCE or times of Artaxerxes II, 404–358 BCE). They base their inquiry on the Biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah. They provide a complex social portrait of the four groups related to the temple in Jerusalem.

Roosa Kallunki presents in Chapter 4 the role of child priests in Roman Italy. Her strictly epigraphic corpus covers the period from the late Republic to the reign of Flavii. She presents 5 contexts where the children appear as priests: 1) the Vestal Virgins, 2) the Salii priests, 3) the priests of Vulcan in Ostia, 4) individual cases of child priests, 5) the child priests from the imperial family.

With Chapter 5 'Building for the Gods: Builders, Sculptors and Decorators in the Selected Partho-Roman Eastern Temples.' Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider focuses mostly on the Aramaic epigraphic evidence from Hatra, Palmyra and Wadi Ramm concerning the social and religious role of masons and sculptors working for the temples in the late Parthian and imperial Roman period. She examines the vocabulary of the professions and the networks of the people engaged in the construction and decoration of temples.

Chapter 6 by Krzysztof Nawotka takes on the figures of prophetai in the sanctuary of Apollo and Artemis in Didyma, one of the most important oracular temples of antiquity. In the scope of the quantitative method, he provides a study of the people who exerted this function, making a point that the Didymean *prophetai* presiding over the temple and Oracle of Apollo, leading processions, hosting at banquets the venerable religious body of *Kosmoi*.

Haggai Olshanetsky in Chapter 7 analyzes Jewish soldiers in the Roman army with a particular attention on their religious practices during the military service. By the study of many cases from the 2nd until the early 5th century., e.g. Dura-Europos, Palmyra, Sardis, Tzipporis, etc. he presents that the Jewish members of the army were also active in the religious sphere.

Carl-Loris Raschel in his chapter (Chapter 8) 'Second-line God's servants. Craftsmen in Egyptian temples during the Roman era.' turns the attention on the craftsmen and their role in the temple life. The analysis of the inscriptional and papyrological material leads to the observation that the craftsmen collaborating with the temples had a special relationship with the cultic place and clergy in providing the goods for the service and priests.

Chapter 9 'Signifying Networks: Social Contexts of Meaning in Jewish Epigraphy of Late Roman Palestine' by Alexei Sivertsev presents the role of the families and the linguistic situation of the synagogues.

Zozan Tarhan in Chapter 10 tackles the significant role of the Assyrian kings in rituals and their involvement in the priestly functions.

The last chapter (11) in Part I, by Agnieszka Wojciechowska deals with the Egyptian priests in the Hellenistic and early Roman imperial period. She copes with the priesthood from the administrative and scribal aspects.

Part II consists of 5 papers dealing with archaeological and ethnographic approach to the topic of serving the gods. The first paper (Chapter 12) in this part by Ilaria Bucci combines archaeology with the epigraphical attestations from the Temple III in Hatra. She regards the people who were frequenting and working for this sanctuary.

Erin Darby offers in her chapter (Chapter 13) the ethnoarchaeological approach towards the production of pottery within the cultic context. She presents how terracotta artisan communities gained and curated ritual knowledge and how their services were commissioned.

Chapter 14 by Gloria London and Beatrice McLoughlin has a similar ethnoarchaeological focus. The authors offer a study of the producers and sellers of the terracotta incense-burners for the private and church purposes in Cyprus.

Nicolas Samaretz in his paper (Chapter 15) 'Approaching the Divine: The Memory of Donors in a Late-4th / Early-5th-Century CE Christian Shrine Through Monuments, Funerary Evidence, and Objects' gives a glimpse into the Christianity. He focuses on the issue of costly donations for the churches as well as honoring the martyrs by private donors of the funerary chapels.

The volume is closed by Bernhard Schneider (Chapter 16) who, based on the preliminary results from his survey in Southern Iraq, discusses the location of rural (stamped) brick production for public projects such as temples. He is also discussing the implications of evidence of where such material probably was reused at a later period also as raw material, for example for the production of artificial basalt.

Serving the Gods: Exploring the Human Resources of Ancient Temples

Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider,[1] *Bernhard Schneider*[2]
(University of Wrocław)

According to ancient Mesopotamian mythology,[3] gods created mankind to release themselves from unwished and hard chores, thus the purpose of every human being was to serve the gods.[4] Hence, the temples were the foremost organization where the service to the divine beings was achieved. Polytheistic and monotheistic religions are very complex systems and are therefore to some degree institutionalized. To operate temples human resources were needed. While thinking about paying service to the deities, one has an image of a priest, a celebrant, who is making sacrifices to the gods.[5] The highly specialized personnel is only a fragment of the temple society. Here the workforce is organized in a hierarchical structure relaying on the multifarious networks composed of the family, political and professional nodes.[6] This chapter, having the introductory character to the entire volume, presents the idea of human resources within the studies on the ancient temples, the prototypes for the modern institutions. Regardless of the relatively young concept of human resources, emerged in the late 20th century applied to the management of the manpower within the

1 This research is part of the project No. 2021/43/P/HS3/02595 co-funded by the National Science Centre and the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 945339. This research is part of the project Maestro UMO-2021/42/A/HS3/00421 *"Epigraphic culture in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East in antiquity: status, display, democracy, identity"* funded by the National Science Centre, Poland.

2 This research is part of the project No. 2022/45/P/HS3/03924 co-funded by the National Science Centre and the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 945339.

3 See for example Jacobsen 1978 (Sumerian) and Foster 2005 (Akkadian), Lenzi 2019.

4 Sterba 1976, 16–17.

5 The literature about different aspects of ancient priesthoods is very large and it is not worth to bring all the titles here. For an overview through different regions and places see e.g. Coulon and Gatier 2018; Löhnert 2007 and 2010; Pirenne-Delforge 2010; Clarisse 2010; Spencer 2010; Waerzeggers 2011; Kubiak-Schneider 2023; Clarisse 2010; Spencer 2010; Kubiak-Schneider 2023; Debourse and Jursa 2025.

6 See for example Jursa 2010; Kleber 2008; Kubiak-Schneider and Mazurek 2025.

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modern corporations and institutions, this conception suits well in the studies of the temples. Human resources are networks of individuals, it is one of the key concepts of the organizational (how the organization work?) and personnel economy (study of the management of human resources: hiring, training, teamwork, compensation).[7]

The functioning of ancient temples as well as churches and other places of worship was highly dependent also on suppliers such as butchers, winemakers, brewers, land and stock holders as well as on builders, architects, artists (e.g. sculptors, painters, musicians) and craftsmen. Also, those who pass by and leave dedications for their own gods in the temples of the others can be counted among the people who somehow served to the deities. The major question in the analysis of the temple work which must be posed here: WHO, together with the priests, was serving the gods? This is necessary to understand how cultic centers were operated in antiquity. The key purpose of temples, besides being the dwelling place of the deities, is the maintenance of religious practices.

Temples as institutions of worship and economy[8]

The gods needed magnificent earthly houses, underlining a special status of their inhabitants. It could have been achieved through the rich decoration and distinctive architectural form of the temples as well as through the luxurious materials and tools used for the equipment of such places. Craftsmen and artists were responsible for the iconographic religious program, but with a strict collaboration with the highly specialized personnel shown by the examples from Pharaonic Egypt, pre-Hellenistic Mesopotamia and Parthian Hatra.[9]

The society of gods, mirroring the human communities, required food and clothes. All these points could have been completed through the work of people. The human resources of the temples were responsible for management of the worship places: from the aspects of economy, administration and rituals as communication with the divine. The temples engaged in the long distant trade as is attested by the epigraphic sources from Roman period Tadmor-Palmyra and archival contracts from the ancient Mesopotamian temples (Neo-Babylonian period). Middlemen were hired to facilitate such transactions, mainly to acquire exotic goods e.g. stones, dyes and metals which served for the functioning and maintenance of the cultic places as well as during rituals.[10] For their economic sustainability, sacred organizations owned or leased the animal herds and the lands where grains, vines, olives and fruit trees (e.g. pomegranades and date palms) were cultivated.[11]

7 Lundberg and Mikalachki 1965. For organizational economy theories see e.g. Donaldson 1990; Gibons and Roberts 2015.

8 See Jursa 2010 for an overview and Liverani 2016 for further bibliography. For a study of the relationship of temple and state see Kleber 2008.

9 See Borrelli, Escobar 2022, 30; Kubiak-Schneider in this volume.

10 For Palmyra see Gregoratti 2020, Kubiak-Schneider 2023, 39.

11 See Jursa 2010, 419–431 for the situation in 1st millennium BC Mesopotamia. See also Brinks 2009 for the temple of Artemis in Ephesos which had also vineyards, quarries and herds of animals.

There was always a close work between states (also on the level of city-states, not only on the imperial level) and religious organs. As the example from late Achaemenid Mambij shows, the temples could mint the coins with the name of the priest of Atargatis and Hadad as the sign of a particular satrapy and autonomy.[12]

Religious institutions like temples were dependent on political and historical situations. In pre-Hellenistic Mesopotamia and Pharaonic Egypt they were entangled with royal administration.[13] In the Classical world and in the Near East during the Seleucid, Parthian and Roman imperial era the temples were rather dependent on the care and maintenance of private individuals.[14] Despite of that, the Aramaic inscriptions from Hatra (2nd–3rd century CE) show the entanglement of the royal house and service to the deities. The kings of this Northern Mesopotamian city were actively engaged, according to the epigraphic material, being the great sages within the cult of Šamaš, similarly to the Roman *pontifices maximi* and Assyrian kings being the high priests of Aššur.[15]

Inscriptions attest the costly donations for the gods, commemorating also the benefactors of the temples with the statues and public honors issued by the cities as well as by the religious collegia.[16] The incomes and outcomes as well as religious literature and important documentation needed to be stored, that is why the temples had treasuries and archives. Some temples, like the temple of the goddess Ma of Comana in Cappadocia, kept the wills of the deceased written on wax tablets.[17] The textual evidence form the temple in Soknopaiou Nesos is the best documented sacred institutions from Roman Egypt, providing us information concerning administrative and economic activities, including agreements, contracts, tax receipts, etc.[18]

Some cultic centers specialized in healings and functioned as sacred hospitals. One of such was a temple of Asklepios in Pergamon, described by e.g. Aelius Aristides in his *Hieroi Logoi* giving a complex insight into the therapeutic practices in the Asklepieion in the 2nd century CE.[19] A forerunner of this might have been the institution of the temple of Gula, the ancient Mesopotamian goddess of healing temple in Isin.[20]

Temples as institutions guaranteed permanence of ceremony and place.[21] The Jerusalem temple and Christian churches guaranteed the permanence of personnel in the fig-

12 See Andrade 2017.
13 Jursa 2010.
14 See for example Robson 2019: 180–190.
15 Dirven 2005–2005, 376; Drijver 1990, 822–823; Kubiak-Schneider 2022, 799–800.
16 E.g. in Palmyra IGLS 17/1.18 dated on the 1st century CE. The Greco-Aramaic inscription is a *titulus honorarius* issued by *polis* (city) of Palmyrenes for Mokimu, the local benefactor of the temple of Bel. The reason stated in the Greek version enumerates the deeds of Mokimu: giving money for the sanctuary, offerings and donation of the incense burner in gold worth 150 denars.
17 The inscription SEG 52–1464ter (dated 50–150 CE) attests such a practice.
18 See Ruffing 2007; Chaufray 2023.
19 For the commentaries see Petridou, G. 2017.
20 Charpin 2011, 410.
21 See Ulanowski and Warburton 2025.

ures of priests.[22] Ancient sacred institutions were well-running machines which impacted ancient societies and their environment.

Studying the servants of gods

Antiquity is still far too often approached through a Eurocentric and Classical (Greco-Roman) lens.[23] With the present volume we tend to offer a broader view applying the approach of the Mealammu project (see below). The idea behind the volume which is a pilot for future research project is to look at the temple, a cultic center full of people of different specializations and an economic hub with developed administrative system. The topic as it is presented within this volume was rarely considered within a broader study bearing in mind different ancient cultures and periods. Beside the private experience of religions, there was and still is, what can be observed e.g. in Christianity, Judaism and Islam, a public and organized dimension of the worship. Through the vast idea of serving the deities we wanted to lay the basis for future research on the management of the religions from the comprehensive social and economic point of view.

State-of-the-art

The last decades of research within the history of religions brought many publications and projects oriented on the deities, individual experience of the gods, material and sensory approach, presenting various theoretical concepts e.g. Lived Ancient Religions, religioscapes, materiality of religion or material turn.[24] The Lived Ancient Religions focuses on the personal and individual perception of religious practices and places, leaving the administrative aspects aside.[25] The materiality of private votive objects is the focus of two recent projects led by C. Tsouparopoulou.[26] The concept of the material turn in the studies of the Ancient Near Eastern religions as proposed recently by N. Laneri emphasizes a relationship between the remains of ancient ritual actions (e.g. relics of human bodies, ob-

22 For the Jerusalem temple see e.g. Haran 1985.

23 That in this volume we provide the place for analysis of the topic through the eyes of different world cultures, although it is regrettable that such regions as the Americas, India or Oceania were left out.

24 Bonnet et al. 2018; Hayden and Walker 2013; Nuño et al. 2021; Rüpke 2015; Williamson 2021.

25 Rüpke 2011.

26 Anderson and Tsouparopoulou 2020; Tsouparopoulou et al. forthcoming; see also Pongratz-Leisten 2021. For a more recent perspective on Ancient Near Eastern Religions see Wasilewska 2009. In the current MeMaRe project Tsouparopoulou focuses on the context (included into a GIS database) of uninscribed private objects whereas before she and Adam Anderson focused on inscribed objects. Another approach for later periods is the MAP-project which was led by Corinne Bonnet. See Bonnet et al 2022. For studies related to this project see Galoppin et al 2022. For an ancient Near Eastern city founded around its temples see there also Schneider 2022. For the openly accessible online database see Bonnet 2017- https://base-map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr (accessed 15 May 2025).

jects, natural environment, architectural vestiges, etc.) and beliefs in transcendent beings.[27] He turns the attention on the material and spatial aspect of the Mesopotamian temples, but not on the facet of organization and management from the human side. The modern textual basis for research on the 1st millennium BC ancient Mesopotamian temples and society was laid by Michael Jursa and the circle of scholars involved in his START project.[28] He noticed the importance of religious institutions (temples) in the economic growth and development of the cities. It is the most comprehensive study of the ancient economy. His research is founded on the analysis of the cuneiform tablets from, among others, the temple archives which gave invaluable insight into the economic systems in Mesopotamia in the 1st millennium BCE.

Furthermore, a significant volume edited by L. Coulon and P.-L. Gatier concentrates only on the priesthood giving a multicultural overview starting with Mesopotamia, passing through Egypt, India, Persia and the Classical world.[29] J. Aliquot and J.-B. Yon mention the people around the priests like guardians of treasury, musicians, instructors, etc. but they do not provide a profound analysis of the other temple staff but focus specifically on priests.[30]

Finally, the volume edited by A. Wilson, N. Ray and A. Trentacoste on the economy of Roman religion makes a point to be a visible mark of the discussion of Roman religion and economic activities within the scholarship.[31] Although many papers focus on the costs and revenues, there are two which analyze the personal element in the temple economy.[32] In the introduction, A. Wilson gathered a set of questions under one big research problem how religion impacted the economic mentalities.[33] Furthermore, he points out that religion and economy were important and overlapping spheres.[34]

Melammu approach

The workshop organized in Wrocław in 2024 by the authors of this volume and being the basis for this book was the 23rd workshop of Melammu Project. In its status we read:

> The main purpose of the Melammu Project is to investigate the continuity, transformation, and diffusion of Mesopotamian and Ancient Near Eastern culture from the third millennium BCE through the ancient world until the Middle Ages. Additionally, the Project compares Mesopotamian and Ancient Near Eastern culture with cultural aspects found elsewhere, both in contemporary and different time

27 Laneri 2024.
28 Jursa 2010. As a theoretical basis served especially the work by Max Weber (1978).
29 Coulon and Gatier 2018.
30 Aliquot and Yon 2018, 210–212.
31 Wilson, Ray and Trentacoste 2023.
32 Chaufray 2023; Verboven 2023.
33 Wilson 2023, 45.
34 Wilson 2023, 46.

periods. Finally, the Project is also interested in how Mesopotamian and Ancient Near Eastern culture live on in and influence the modern world.

The project Melammu promotes interdisciplinarity and a cross-cultural approach to understand the different phenomena and aspects of antique world. That is how we tackle the issue of "serving the gods".

We look at the epigraphic and other textual (e.g. historical and papyrological) attestations of the professions, vocabulary determining people and their connections to the sanctuaries. Furthermore, we are interested in the iconographical testimonies, attributes related to the professions issued for the temple services, not necessarily priestly. Finally, we consider the material and archaeological evidence found in and outside the temples (pottery, masonry, small objects, etc.) connected to the craft workshops posing a question if we can attribute objects to people and particular workshops. The diachronic and broad scope permits us to see patterns and connectivity of the ancient world.

All the individuals with their genealogies, capacities, ethnicities, etc. form a diverse social stratum and create a network within a place of worship.[35] That is why we suggest tackling this topic through the lenses of prosopography and archaeology of ancient sanctuaries. By organizing this workshop and its outcome in form of this volume, we also tried to establish and encourage further discussion between the different disciplines of research covering antiquity, including civilizations beyond the traditional area of the Mediterranean basin, to understand for example the social status (elites vs non-elites) of the people (individuals, families, communities) connected to the places of worship in different cultures. Within this spirit, the contributions in this volume offer diverse angles of views on the multifaceted issue of serving and non-serving the gods.[36]

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35 See that e.g. in Kubiak-Schneider and Mazurek 2025.

36 About non-serving see Fink within this volume.

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Divine Servants on Strike!
Not Serving the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia

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Mesopotamian Anthropology: The Creation of Humans as Servants of the Gods

It is well known that purely theoretical treatises, in the style of Aristotelian philosophy, are not part of Mesopotamian literature. Marc van de Mieroop has recently argued that lexical lists might have been the primary tool for speculative reasoning in Ancient Mesopotamia.[1] While the anthropology of the lexical texts might be worth investigating, here I will focus on a set of literary texts. In Mesopotamian literature, philosophical questions are discussed in concrete settings, with the reader expected to learn from the examples provided. Philosophical ideas are conveyed through dialogues, epics, myths, or short sayings. Some of these texts describe drinking parties of gods, others recount heroic journeys around the world, or present discussions between a suffering person and their friend. All these texts have unique settings and tell engaging stories about individuals and their adventures or problems on the surface level. However, experienced readers (and listeners) can uncover additional layers of meaning and interpretation, grasp their philosophical teachings, and engage in discussions about them.[2] In some cases, the discussions of the ancients are preserved in text commentaries.[3] Unfortunately, none of the commentaries gives us specific information about Mesopotamian Anthropology.

When Mesopotamian texts inform us about the creation of the first humans, we can read them as entertaining stories, explaining how mankind came into being. Especially in the third millennium, creation does not seem to be a central topic, many texts just mention human creation in passing.[4] The surprise that the literary texts of the third millennium show no special interest in human creation, is expressed by Jan Lisman, who concluded regarding the texts of the third millennium: „I could not find any trace of human begin-

1 Van De Mieroop 2017.
2 See Vanstiphout 2004.
3 For a detailed discussion of the cuneiform commentaries see Frahm 2011.
4 All dates provided are BC.

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nings, not even a hint in the direction of the creation of any human being or the necessity for this."[5] As Peeter Espak and I have demonstrated, this view is a bit too pessimistic, and information on human creation can be found in an abundance of sources, although most of them focus on other topics and mention human creation only in passing.[6] Toward the end of the third and the beginning of the second millennium, the dating of many literary texts is uncertain, literary texts display a keen interest in the topic of human creation. In addition to the simple description of the process of creation, Mesopotamian myths also inform us about the motives for the creation of human beings. This means that they not only provide us with information on how the creation of humans took place, but that they also discuss the purpose and intention of human creation, thereby providing us with insights into a Mesopotamian understanding of human nature, a Mesopotamian answer to the question: What is the human?[7]

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss two major Mesopotamian myths that describe the creation of humans as replacements for the working gods. According to these myths, the very nature of human beings is to serve the gods and perform hard labor on their behalf. While it might seem obvious at first glance that humans should serve the gods in one way or another, the realization of this concept in Mesopotamia is remarkably concrete. Humans were tasked with responsibilities such as agriculture, temple construction, and canal maintenance, as they were created to relieve the gods of these burdens. Consequently, working in the fields—plowing, harrowing, sowing, and harvesting—was not merely mundane labor but an essential aspect of human servitude to the gods. This work was therefore regarded as an inherent part of human nature.

While it is generally a hard task to date literary texts, and the date of composition of neither of the texts discussed below can be exactly determined, the motif of creating humanity as a divine workforce seems to have emerged around the end of the third millennium. *Enki and Ninmaḫ* is a myth in Sumerian language, which first informs us about the long slumber of Enki, the complaints of the gods about the hard work, the creation of humanity and finally about the drinking party of Enki and Ninmaḫ, where they challenge each other with the creation of defective human beings and finding a meaningful occupation for them. The myth starts with a description of primeval times when "the senior gods oversaw the work, while the minor gods were bearing the toil. The gods were digging the canals and piling up the silt in Ḫarali. The gods, crushing the clay, began complaining about this life."[8] As the situation was getting out of control, Namma, the mother of the great gods, decided to wake up her son Enki from his slumber and assigned

5 Lisman, 2013: 175–176.

6 Espak / Fink in print.

7 It is rather obvious that there were different understandings of human nature in Mesopotamia, the textual "stream of tradition" however represents a quite coherent image.

8 Enki and Ninmah, lines 8–11. An online edition with an English translation of the text is found in the Electronical Text Corpus of Sumerian literature https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.1.2# Ceccarelli 2016 provides us with a new edition of the text, a German translation and extensive commentary.

to him the task of creating a substitute for the gods. Enki considers the matter and finds a solution – the creation of man:

> My mother, (now) there is the blood (of Enki? / of Namma?) which you set aside,
> the hard work of the gods impose on it. (?)
> Clay from the middle of the roof of Abzu you should mix with it (=the blood).
> The birth goddesses shall nip off the clay; you shall put in order the limbs (of the body).
> Ninmah as your companion shall act;
> Ninimma, Šuzianna, Ninmada, Ninšar,
> Ninmug, Mumudu, Ningunna;
> when you give birth, shall stand by.
> My mother, you will determine their destiny, Ninmah will bind them with their hard work.[9]

The motive for creating humanity was to address the complaints of the working gods, perhaps to prevent a revolt and to make their lives more agreeable. It seems that the minor gods also desired a life like Enki's, spending most of their days sleeping in a cool room on a comfortable bed. The anthropological teaching of this text is that humans were created to work in order to make the lives of the minor gods more pleasant. In the final part of the text, defective human beings are created by Ninmaḫ, and it becomes evident that all humans, regardless of their condition, were created to work. Even defective humans can find a meaningful place in society, which is organized around the central aim of making the lives of the gods agreeable—by building them beautiful homes, decorating them, pleasing them with music, and serving them the finest meals.[10] All of them get a job assignment, and they can contribute to the central aim of the city and the human society in general: to serve the gods.

In *Atraḫasis* we find a quite similar version of human creation. The oldest manuscripts known today come from the hand of Ipiq-Aya, whose masterful hand is often admired, but he is rather excluded as the author of the text, as he designates himself as a student.[11] Theoretically, not much seems to speak against the idea that the modest scribe Ipiq-Aya was the author of this version of the myth. Earlier references or allusions to this story only prove the existence of certain motifs, not the existence of a written version. Nevertheless, the arguments put forward by Van Koppen about the Enki-worshipping family of Ipiq-Aya seem to suggest that one could attribute the composition/redaction of the story to this family. Then the Ipiq-Aya tablets would just be the first witnesses of an older text that have survived by chance.[12] *Atraḫasis* and *Enki and Ninmaḫ* share many motifs

9 Lambert 1992: 131–133.

10 In the third millennium the city god was the ideological head of the city state. The whole city was his private property and it was designed to support him. See Selz 2012.

11 See Löhnert 2011 for a discussion of this scribe and his literary activities.

12 Van Koppen 2011, 155–159.

regarding the creation of humanity. As we usually assume that *Atraḫasis* is the younger text, it provides us with a reworked version of the story of human creation in *Enki and Ninmaḫ* with some clear differences. The role of Enki is not that of the highest god anymore, but he is still a central figure and finally responsible for human creation. Enlil, the ruler of the gods, is not the best character in this text and by no means a friend of the humans. I argued elsewhere that he was intentionally depicted as a coward, in contrast to the all-powerful Enlil in the *Curse of Agade* and the City Laments.[13] The text starts by describing the fate of gods in primeval times:

> "When the gods like men
> Bore the work and suffered the toil
> The toil of the gods was great,
> The work was heavy, the distress was much
> The Seven great Anunnaki
> Were making the Igigi suffer the work."
> (lines 1–6)[14]

Here we have two groups of gods, the seven great Anunnaki and the not-so-great Igigi, who had to do all the work. With the help of Enki and Mami a solution to the problem is finally found – once more, it is the creation of humanity, to liberate the gods from the heavy work and make the new creatures responsible for all the hard tasks the Igigi had to deal with:

> "Mami opened her mouth
> And addressed the great gods,
> 'You commanded me a task, I have completed it;
> You have slaughtered a god together with his personality.
> I have removed your heavy work,
> I have imposed your toil on man.
> You raised a cry for mankind,
> I have loosened the yoke. I have established freedom.'
> They heard this speech of hers,
> They ran together and kissed her feet."
> (lines 235–245)[15]

At the end of both myths, freedom for the gods is established by creating a new class of servants. Besides conveying the idea that freedom means being free from work, the main message of the texts is that humanity has a clear function in this world. Humans were created to free the gods from hard work, to end the slavery of the gods, and therefore, hard

13 Fink 2024.
14 Lambert / Millard 1969, 43.
15 Lambert / Millard 1969, 59.

work for the gods is humanity's innate purpose. In 1971 Giovanni Pettinato discussed all the accounts of human creation available to him at that time and tried to find distinct Sumerian and Akkadian approaches to work. He thought that Sumerians had a more positive attitude towards work than the Akkadians, who saw work as an unbearable burden.[16] Today, Assyriologists are somewhat skeptical of finding a clear-cut difference between Sumerian and Akkadian, as most of the Sumerian literature that has come down to us emerged in a bilingual scribal environment in post-Sumerian times. However, later Akkadian texts like *Enuma Elis*[17] demonstrate a similar attitude towards work and the hard fate of humanity, so Pettinato concluded that the Akkadians had mainly had a negative and pessimistic attitude towards life and tried to explain this with their nomadic background.[18] The valuable point of Pettinato's findings is that hard work was the main purpose of human life, but what do humans get in return for the fulfillment of their duties?

The Problem of Theodicy

If humans believe in being created to serve the gods, humans might expect that the gods will, in turn, take care of their servants. Humans were not granted eternal life as individuals like the gods, but they might hope that their short earthly life will be somehow bearable and that mankind as a whole will survive.[19] The basic reasoning is simple: If I fulfill my duties for the gods, the gods will take good care of me. The divine world and the whole cosmos are imagined as well-organized places, steered by an intellect, and organized along the same lines as human societies. As justice is a cornerstone of any human society, justice is also a central element in the imagined organization of the cosmos.[20] If a person follows the rules and pleases the gods, this person should be well. If a person breaks the rules, this person should be punished. This holds for human justice, but also for divine justice. When there is an open discrepancy between the acts of a person and his or her fate, the problem of Theodicy comes in. The term was coined by the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716). In his book on the subject, he discusses the philosophical problem of why an omnipotent and benevolent god allows evil and suffering in the world.[21] If someone is convinced that he did his best to serve the gods and he still experiences bad things in life, he might come up with the conclusion that something is wrong with this world.

The Mesopotamian, and also most of the modern texts treating this problem, often try to find a solution by explaining that there is nothing wrong with the world, that this world is actually just, but that this fact is not always easy to see.[22] In several texts where an

16 Pettinato 1971, 25.
17 For an edition of the text see Lambert 2013.
18 Pettinato 1971, 47.
19 For an analysis of individual and collective destiny see George 2012.
20 For a convincing analysis of the principles of early worldviews see Topitsch 1972.
21 Leibniz 1996. The book was first printed in 1710.
22 Fink 2012.

innocent sufferer laments his fate, as far as I can see, all the sufferers of this genre are male in Mesopotamian texts, it finally turns out that the sufferer was not as innocent as he claimed to be. The benevolent gods helped him to understand his secret sin. When the sufferer recognizes the sin, the punishment ends. This concept of the revelation of an unconscious or secret sin solves two problems. The suffering comes to an end, and at the same time, the sufferer understands that nothing is wrong with this world; it still is a just place.

Other texts, however, openly question the justice of the gods and call the basic principle of Mesopotamian anthropology that man was made to serve the gods into question. One of the first texts dealing with the problem of divine injustice is *Urnamma's Death*. Urnamma was the founder of the third dynasty of Ur and ruled from 2012–2095. In *Urnamma's Death* (ca. 2095), the fate of the ruler is bemoaned, and the ruler himself questions the effectiveness of serving the gods:

> 162.) What have I obtained by being so zealous serving (the gods) by day?
> 163.) I have (even) spent the time sleeplessly serving (the gods) by night![23]

What we see here is the Mesopotamian version of disbelief in the gods. The text does not call into question the existence of the gods, but it seems to question whether serving the gods is in some way helpful for humans. However, not only Urnamma and his friends and family are upset about his untimely death. In the following lines we hear the voice of Inana, the goddess of love and war with a special relationship to kings,[24] angrily complaining about the decision of the great gods to let Urnamma die:

> 207.) "I want to hurl the following as an insult at An, the lord of the gods:
> 208.) That Enlil has raised the head with/in front of me – who has changed that word?
> 209.) The sublime word that king An has uttered – who has changed that word?
> 210.) Rules in the land may have been established for us, but they have not been observed.
> 211.) For the place of the gods where daylight breaks, its abundance does not exist (anymore)."[25]

While we hear nothing about serving the gods in these lines, they seem to indicate that the gods could change the rules or plans (ĝeš.ḫur in line 210) of the land for some unknown reason. If a goddess also agrees that the gods did something wrong, this seems to indicate that being a good servant of the gods did not pay out for this king. For Urnamma, it is too late to do something about this, but people who are alive and think that they are being treated unjustly still have the option to act. One possibility was to lament to the gods and ask for their mercy; if lamenting and praying did not work, more resolute measures

23 Flückinger-Hawker 1999, 129.
24 See Westenholz 2000.
25 Flückinger-Hawker 1999, 137.

could be taken. The minor gods in *Atraḫasis* decided to lay down their work and protested against their fate.

The successful Strike of the Igigi

As mentioned above, Enlil is the head of the pantheon in *Atraḫasis*, and the minor gods start a revolution against him; they burn their tools and march toward his palace to force him to change their situation:

> 'Enlil, the counsellor of the gods, the hero,
> Come, let us unnerve him in his dwelling!
> Now, proclaim war,
> Let us mingle hostilities and battle.'
> The goods heeded his words:
> They set fire to their tools,
> Fire to their spades they put
> And flames to their hods.
> They held them as they went
> To the gate of the shrine of the hero Enlil.
> (lines 59–69)[26]

When Enlil wakes up and finds his temple Ekur surrounded by the angry Igigi, he sends out the god Nusku as an envoy to speak to them. The speech of the minor gods clearly articulates the problem:

> 'Excessive [toil] has killed us;
> Our work [was heavy], the distress much.
> [Now, every] single one of us gods
> Has spoken in favour of [war?] with Enlil.'
> When Enlil heard that speech
> His tears flowed.
> (lines 159–167)

It is strange to read that the most powerful Mesopotamian god was so full of fear that he started crying. It seems that the threat of the Igigi was taken seriously by him, as they represented a real threat to him. So he tries to find a solution with the help of the fellow great gods, which is the creation of mankind as described above. While the Igigi are happy after the creation of humanity, they could also serve as a role model for humans, who are unhappy with their lives and who want to improve their situation. Seemingly, the Igigi

26 Lambert / Millard 1969, 47.

were more powerful than humans, but their leader was punished for starting the revolt. This seems to be a warning: the gods might decide to hit the humans harder than their fellow gods if they decide to start a rebellion against them.

Narām-Sîn's unsuccessful war against the Ekur

While we have seen above how the "war" of the Igig ended their suffering and gave them the opportunity to lead a relaxed life, going to war against Enlil turned out badly for Narām-Sîn (ca. 2273–2219), a king of the empire of Agade. Narām-Sîn was not only a king, but according to the following inscription, Narām-Sîn was also a god and had a temple in Agade:[27]

> Narām-Sîn, the mighty, king of Agade, when the four quarters together revolted against him, through the love which the goddess Aštar showed him, he was victorious in nine battles in one year, and the kings whom they (the rebels[?]) had raised (against him), he captured. In view of the fact that he protected the foundations of his city from danger, (the citizens of) his city requested from Aštar in Eanna, Enlil in Nippur, Dagān in Tuttul, Ninḫursag in Keš, Ea in Eridu, Sin in Ur, Šamaš in Sippar, (and) Nergal in Kutha, that (Narām-Sîn) be (made) the god of their city, and they built within Agade a temple (dedicated) to him. (lines 1–57)[28]

The only text that informs us about Narām-Sîn's war against Enlil is "The Curse of Agade." This text recounts the story of Agade's rise and fall and is usually thought to have been composed in the Ur III period or earlier, so it predates *Atraḫasis*, which was composed in the Old Babylonian period. Therefore, it seems that the description of Narām-Sîn's revolt against Enlil was not inspired by the Igigi.

The story begins with a description of Agade as a prosperous city, blessed by the gods and filled with exotic animals and all imaginable luxurious goods from foreign lands. The inhabitants of Agade live in happiness, and offerings were brought to Inana from all over the world. This happiness is broken by the discontent of Inana with the offerings, as she wanted to have a new temple in Agade, but the Ekur, the temple of Enlil, did not give the necessary permission. The text simply states "The word from Ekur was as silence".[29] Inana then decides to leave Agade, and all the other gods follow her, thereby removing their divine powers and their divine protection from the city. His first reaction of Narām-Sîn seems to be the proper and expected one. If the gods decide, the only thing affected humans can do is to lament and pray to the gods for mercy and ask them to change their verdict:

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27 That kings claimed to be divine was not the norm in Mesopotamia. The idea of divine kingship was an ideological innovation of the new empire of Agade, most probably aiming at overcoming the century-old city-state ideology. See Fink 2021, 126. Brisch 2013 discusses the evidence and analysis the phenomenon of divine kingship in Mesopotamia with numerous references to the earlier discussion.

28 Frayne, 113–114 (= RIME2.1.4.10).

29 Cooper 1983, 53 (line 57).

> That the kingdom of Agade would no longer occupy a good, lasting residence, that its future was altogether unfavorable, that its temples would be shaken and their stores scattered – this is what Naramsin saw in a dream! He understood it, but would not articulate it, nor would he talk with anyone about it. Because of Ekur he donned mourning garb, covered his chariot with reed mats, tore the reed canopy off his processional ship, and gave away his royal paraphernalia. Naramsin was immobile for seven years! Who has ever seen a king act so anomalously for seven years? (lines 83–93).[30]

After lamenting and trying to convince the Ekur, interestingly, Enlil is again not mentioned in these lines, Narām-Sîn performs extispicy to get the permission for building a temple for Inana and to change the fate of his empire:

> Performing extispicy with regard to the temple, the (omen for) building the temple was not present in the extispicy, performing extispicy for a second time with regard to the temple, the (omen for) building the temple was not present in the extispicy. In order to effect a change in his situation, he tried to alter Enlil's pronouncement, he scattered what he had gathered together, and mustered his troops. Like an athlete coming into a great courtyard, he clasped his hand in triumph over Ekur, like a runner bent to start a race, he treated the giguna as (if it were only) thirty shekels, like a robber plundering the city, he set tall ladders against the temple. To demolish Ekur as if it were a huge ship, to break up its soil, like mountains where precious metals are mined, to splinter it, like the lapis lazuli mountain, to prostrate it, like a city inundated by Iškur, for the temple – though it was not the mountains where cedars are felled – he had large axes cast, he had double-edged agasilig-axes sharpened. He set spades against his roots, and it sunk low as the foundation of the land (lines 94–116).

Like the Igigi in *Atraḫasis,* Narām-Sîn threatens Enlil, but he does not reach his aim. Instead of only demonstrating his unhappiness with the current situation like the Igigi did by surrounding the Ekur, Narām-Sîn destroys the Ekur, the home of Enlil. The Enlil of the *Curse of Agade* has quite a different character than the Enlil of *Atraḫasis.* While Enlil is a powerful city-destroyer in the first text, he has a rather dubious character in the second one – instead of an all-powerful god, he is depicted as a coward.[31] As we might expect, the war of the minor god Narām-Sîn against the great god Enlil does not end well for him. His attack on the Ekur is the reason for the destruction of Agade, and Enlil uses the savage Gutium as his divine tool of destruction. The destruction of Agade, the starvation, and the dire situation in the besieged city are described in detail for the first time in Mesopotamian literature. The text ends with the great gods cursing the already destroyed Agade to soothe Enlil's angry heart. One of the teachings of this text might be that human beings,

30 Cooper 1983, 55.
31 Fink 2024.

no matter how powerful they are, are still servant of their gods. They should not trust too much in their own power, because the real power rests with the gods.

The Story of the Flood

In the *Curse of Agade* we have seen a partial destruction of the world. A city is eradicated from the surface of the earth because its ruler started a war against Enlil. But now let us go back to *Atraḫasis*. As mentioned above, the gods are happy after the creation of humanity, as the humans took over their duty, and they can all sleep happily. For 1200 years, everything goes well, but then the noise (*rigmu*) of humanity disturbs the gods. This noise has been interpreted in various ways, and it was suggested to understand it as "sinful noise", but today most interpreters of the text are convinced that such a moral interpretation is wrong. The gods are simply annoyed by the noise of the humans and they want to get rid of them, because they want to secure their sleep.[32] So Enlil decides to send a great flood to get rid of humanity again. However, as Oshima notes, Enlil had not considered the consequences of his emotional decision. As the flood had swept over the land, there were no humans left to work for the gods and bring them offerings. Seemingly, Enlil had forgotten why he had ordered the creation of the humans and that they now occupied an important position in the world. The text continues with a description of the desperate state of the gods:

> She wept and eased her feelings,
> Nintu wailed and spent her emotion.
> The gods wept with her for the land,
> She was surfeited with grief and thirsted for beer.
> Where she sat, they sat weeping,
> Like sheep, they filled the trough.
> Their lips were feverishly athirst,
> They were suffering cramp from hunger." (III, iv, lines 15–22)[33]

The text further indicates that Enlil did not consider the consequences of his action, and a new solution to the problem of human noise is suggested by the wise god Enki / *Ea*. As these passages are not well preserved in *Atraḫasis* let us have a look at the corresponding passage on the 11th tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic. In the 11th tablet, a slightly different version of the flood story is told, but the basic storyline is the same. The well-preserved text describes how to mother-goddess immediately regret her decision to agree to the flood in the assembly when the flood sets in, that the gods are so afraid that they escape to the highest heaven and that they are left there without housing. The text states that they were

32 See Oshima 2014a with references to the earlier discussion.
33 Lambert / Millard 1969, 97

"curled up like dogs, lying out in the open" (XI, 16).[34] When the gods see the destruction, they bewail the fate of the humans. But when the flood hero brings the first offering to the gods, their reaction is described as follows:

> The gods smelled the savour, the gods smelled the sweet savour, the god gather like flies around the sacrificier. (XI, 161–163)[35]

Being left in the highest heaven without home or food, the gods quickly realized that they had made a mistake. This becomes obvious when Ea gives the following speech to Enlil:

> You, the sage of the gods, the hero, how could you lack counsel and cause the deluge? On him who commits a sin, inflict his crime! On him who does wrong, inflict his wrong-doing! Slack off, lest it be snapped! Pull taut, lest it become [slack!] Instead of the Deluge you caused, a lion could arise to diminish the people! Instead of the Deluge you caused, a wolf could arise to diminish the people! Instead of the Deluge you caused, a famine could happen to slaughter the land! Instead of the Deluge you caused, Erra could arise to slaughter the land![36]

The message of the text is clear. Enlil's decision to punish everyone without discrimination was stupid. Enlil should establish justice now and only punish the sinners who deserve punishment, and install fitting punishments to keep the number of people at a bearable level. The actual status of the world, with all its shortcomings, such as man-devouring animals, diseases, war, and death, is explained as the result of a compromise that allows humanity to live and the gods to sleep. The experiment of eliminating their servants did not work out well for the gods; they had to realize that they had become dependent on humanity. This fact or belief gives humans some negotiating power. Since the gods need their services, humans can remind them of this fact and pledge to be good servants in exchange for divine protection. The entire genre of lamentations is based on the belief that the gods make emotional decisions from time to time. Hence, they need to be constantly reminded that the destruction of their abodes and the killing of their servants will lead to discomfort for themselves as well.

While it seems clear that humans cannot follow the path of the Igigi to improve their lives, they can at least expect the gods to treat them with justice after the flood has ended. Although the world established after the flood is not perfect for humans, it should at least be a predictable and just place. If this expectation of a just world order is not met, people might conclude that they should go on strike again and refuse their status as servants of the gods. In the following, I will discuss some texts from the first millennium, usually attributed to the genre of Wisdom literature, which explore such ideas and demonstrate

34 George 2003, 711.
35 Geroge 2003, 713.
36 George 2003, 714–715.

that the question of the nature of humans and their relation to the gods was still a hot topic in later times.

Divine Servants on Strike in the First Millennium

In the so-called "Dialogue of Pessimism", a text commonly dated to the early first millennium, a man and his slave discuss various important aspects of life. As the man is quite undecided about what he should do, the slave always gives good arguments for and against a certain undertaking, as we will see in the following lines:

53 "Slave, listen to me." "Here I am, sir, here I am."
54 "Quickly, fetch me water for my hands, and give it to me
55 So that I can sacrifice to my god." "Sacrifice, sir, sacrifice.
56 The man who sacrifices to his god is satisfied with the bargain:
57 He is making loan upon loan."
58 "No, slave, I will by no means sacrifice to my god."
59 "Do not sacrifice, sir, do not sacrifice.
60 You can teach your god to run after you like a dog,
61 Whether he asks of you rites, or 'Do not consult your god', or anything else."[37]

Here we can see that the slave suggests to his lord that if he does not sacrifice, the god will become hungry like a dog and beg him for sacrifices. The relationship with the gods is based on mutual dependence, and it seems that one can also make good deals with the gods if one is reluctant to fulfill one's duties.

In the "Babylonian Theodicy", which most probably also dates to the early first millennium, a sufferer discusses his fate with a friend and complains about the injustice in the world. In the following passage, he claims that being a loyal servant of the gods does not pay out:

70 Those who neglect the god go the way of prosperity,
71 While those who pray to the goddess are impoverished and dispossessed
72 In my youth I sought the will of my god;
73 With prostration and prayer I followed my goddess.
74 But I was bearing a profitless corvee as a yoke.
75 My god decreed instead of wealth destitution.
76 A cripple is my superior, a lunatic outstrips me.
77 The rogue has been promoted, but I have been brought low.[38]

Here, the sufferer expresses his observation that the world is unjust. While he follows all the rules, he is poor and miserable, all the people who do not care about the gods

37 Lambert 1996, 147–149. A new edition of this text is found in Oshima 2014b.
38 Lambert 1996, 75–77.

are well and ahead of him. In an earlier passage, he even referred to the animals, to demonstrate that the regulations that humans follow are not natural and, so we could conclude, might be simply wrong:

48 The onager, the wild ass, who filled itself with ...
49 Did it pay attention to the giver of assured divine oracles?
50 The savage lion who devoured the choicest flesh,
51 Did it bring its flour offering to appease the goddess's anger?[39]

The reasoning presented here is simple. Some people and even the animals do not care about their status as divine servants. They do not serve the gods, they are not interested in divine oracles, and they do not give offerings to the gods. Nevertheless, they are doing well. If this holds true, the following conclusion is inevitable: One should give up being a servant of the gods and focus on taking care of one's own well-being.

To avoid the sufferer making this conclusion, his friend tries to convince him that he is wrong. He claims that while it seems that those people and animals are doing well, they will find their just punishment in the end. The friend basically states that no one can escape the moral order of this world and that justice will be reached in the end. However, the friend is not very successful in calming down the sufferer, as we can see in the following lines, where the sufferer decides to break with all the norms:

135 I will ignore my god's regulations and trample on his rites.
136 I will slaughter a calf and ... food,
137 I will take the road and go to distant parts.
138 I will bore a well and let loose a flood,
139 Like a robber I will roam over the vast open country.
140 I will go from house to house and ward off hunger;
141 Famished I will walk around and patrol the streets.[40]

While there are various interpretations of the intention of the whole composition,[41] we can see that the sufferer took the argument one step further than the author of the "Dialogue of Pessimism". In the latter text, the slave advises his master to withhold the sacrifices from the god for a while to get more rewards for them later, so the belief in serving the gods is untouched, but the advice is to make good deals with the gods. The sufferer, however, questions the Mesopotamian belief that humans are servants of the gods. While the existence of the gods is not doubted in this text, the suspicion that the gods do not care about human actions is clearly expressed. If the gods were thought not to be interested in the services the humans offer to them, this would render all the pious deeds, the building and restoration of temples, the offerings, and the temple cult around which

39 Lambert 1996, 73–75.
40 Lambert 1996, 79.
41 See Oshima 2014a and Oshima 2015 with further references.

Mesopotamian societies were organized useless and thereby shake the foundations of all Mesopotamian societies.

Conclusion

Our analysis of several literary texts demonstrates that the idea of humans being created as servants of the gods was central to Mesopotamian anthropology. At first glance, this understanding of humans as replacements for divine workers might seem negative. However, the advantage of this worldview is that humanity has a clear position in the cosmos. While modern metaphysical systems often struggle to explain why something outside of God was created, Mesopotamian anthropology provides a straightforward answer: humans were created because the gods needed them.

While doubts about divine justice were occasionally expressed, and the Mesopotamian belief that humans are servants of the gods was questioned in the Theodicy, there is no indication that this led to a decline in the temple cult. Such considerations appear to have been largely academic and did not seem to affect the prevailing belief that humans had a clear role in the world: they were created to serve the gods and, in return, could expect the gods to take care of them.

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The Shepherds and the Cultic Process in the Phoenician World: A new reading of the Phoenician Accounts of Kition

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Introduction: From the Shepherd to the Priest

The cultic process involves numerous professional actors,[1] which includes all individuals providing their workforce to satisfy the gods. These professionals perform at various stages of the process: supply, construction, layout, control of economic activities, celebrations, and presentation of offerings before the deity. This article argues for the inclusion of the shepherd into this process. Indeed, the shepherd is the first actor in the operational chain aimed at honouring the gods.

Animal farming is not only important for cultic process; it is broadly a fundamental activity in human life. It represents an important step in evolution of the societies and has been extensively studied, particularly in the Near East.[2] In historical societies, it remains a major economic sector and, for many human groups, the main source of meat. The development of more sophisticated societies and the specialization of individuals have led to the professionalization of this activity, with the emergence of breeders and shepherds.

This tendency towards professionalism is also evident when it comes to honouring the gods. The desire to offer meat, one of the most prestigious dishes, required a large supply. The people in charge of it therefore played an essential role as suppliers of the raw material for animal sacrifice.

1 I examined all of these professional actors in my doctoral thesis which will be shortly published.

2 Compiled under the title "The Beginnings of Animal Husbandry in the Near and Middle East" in the second volume of issue 25 of the journal Paléorient, seven articles provide a relatively broad overview of the subject (Digard 1999; Edens 1999; Horwitz et al. 1999; Martin 1999; Peters et al. 1999; Vigne, Buitenhuis, et Davis 1999; Zeder 1999). For Mesopotamia, in the 4th and 3rd millennia, Vila 1998.

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The term "shepherd" is attested in the numerous documentations of the ancient Near East : *rē'ū* in Akkadian,[3] RʿY in Ugaritic,[4] and רעה in Biblical Hebrew.[5] However, in the Phoenician and Punic corpus, we know a unique attestation. This can be explained by the characteristics of the Phoenician documentation.

Characteristics of Phoenician documentation

Four main features can characterize the Phoenician documentation:

- The first is the lack of literary texts preserved in Phoenician or Punic.
- The second concerns the number of Phoenician and Punic epigraphic documents, which is relatively small compared to other contemporary documentations.
- The third is the nature of the documentation: monumental, funerary and dedicatory inscriptions are over-represented. For example, the *CIS*, which contains the largest number of inscriptions, contains 6068 inscriptions, including, in numerical order, dedications, almost all of which come from the Carthaginian tophet, funerary and monumental inscriptions.
- The last is the fact that administrative and accounting documents are few and far between. They include sacrificial tariffs and expense accounts. Although new inscriptions have been discovered since the publication overseen by E. Renan, the typological equilibria within the corpus of Phoenician and Punic inscriptions have remained unchanged.[6]

The Kition Accounts

The only attested occurrence of the term RʿY "shepherd"[7] in Phoenician and Punic documentation is found in an inscription discovered at Kition in 1879, in the Bamboula area—one of the two locations (the other being the Kathari area) that have yielded the

3 CAD « R », 300-312. For an initial approach to livestock farming in Mesopotamia, see Lion et Michel 2001. See also Charpin et Durand 1980. For an overview of shepherds in Akkadian documentation, see Groß 2020, 464-76; Jakob 2003, 357–65; Menzel 1981, 1:265.

4 DULAT, 716.

5 Köhler et Baumgartner 1994, 1260. For an overview of shepherds in the Old Testament, see Kellermann 1995; Lesêtre 1912, col. 1613–1618.

6 Two corpora could, in the near or distant future, modify these balances. The first consists of over 700 ostraca unearthed at Idalion (some inscriptions have already been published (Amadasi Guzzo et Zamora López 2016; 2020; Sznycer 2004; Amadasi Guzzo 2017; 2020)). The second also comprises ostraca, this time unearthed on the hill of Bamboula at Kition (Briquel Chatonnet et al. 2025).

7 DNWSI, 1080.

most significant Phoenician remains at Kition, including a temple. The inscription was uncovered during drainage work in the area.[8]

It consists of a gypsum tablet housed at the British Museum.[9] A year later after the discovery of the tablet, it was presented at the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres by E. Renan, alongside other Phoenician inscriptions from Bamboula.[10] The tablet was also included in the first volume of the *CIS,* published in 1881 under the number CIS 86.

This inscription, called Kition Accounts,[11] is certainly one of the most important documents for understanding the professionals involved in the cultic process.[12] The inscription is written in black ink on both sides (A and B), with the ends of several lines missing as well as the lower part of side A and the upper and lower parts of side B. Proposed dates vary between the 5th and 4th centuries, with side A thought to be of a somewhat later date than side B.[13] However, the difficulties in providing a more precise dating are related to the fact that it relies solely on palaeography. Moreover, the known Phoenician documents from this period are relatively rare.

Side A has seventeen lines written along the long edge. The first two lines announce the content of the text, according to which, the text deals with the TKLT YRḤ ʾTNM / BḤDŠ YRḤ ʾTNM "total (expenditure) of the month of Attanim / At the neomenia of the month of ʾTNM" by "Attanim". Then, from lines 3 to 16, twelve professionals receive retribution measured in QPʾ, Pʾ, or QR, such as doorkeepers, gatekeepers, singers, bakers, builders, servants, barbers, and craftsmen.

Side B has twelve lines written along the short edge. As with side A, the first two lines give the content of the inscription: DT ʿQB / BḤDŠ YRḤ PʿLT "That which is in accordance with the retribution / In the neomenia of the month of PʿLT." Following the same pattern as side A, the next lines mention a water master, temple staff, maidens, and three servants. The line of particular interest here is line 8, which mentions the shepherds.

As mentioned above, the archaeological context is not precisely known. It is possible to link the tablet to a sanctuary, since side A mentions builders in charge of constructing a temple for ʿAštart, as well as singers performing for the holy queen and bakers preparing bread for the queen—possibly 'holy queen,' as the text is broken.

Even though these professionals are linked to a temple, it remains unclear whether the text should be attributed to that temple's administration. Indeed, as A. Hermary has not-

8 For a better understanding of this excavation, see Fourrier et Kiely 2012.

9 The first mention of this inscription appeared in Ohnefalsch-Richter 1879, 971.

10 Renan 1880. The first complete study is published one year later (Renan 1881).

11 CIS 86 ; NSI 20 ; KI 29 ; KAI 37 ; Kition III, C 1 ; TSSI 33 ; KB V, n° 1078 and Renan 1880; 1881; Halévy 1883; Van den Branden 1966; Peckham 1968; Teixidor 1969; 1973; Masson et Sznycer 1972; Healey 1974; Dupont-Sommer 1974; Puech 1979; Delcor 1979; Watson 1997.

12 For example, regarding bakers, see Bernardin 2025.

13 Masson et Sznycer 1972, 24.

ed, this text "could be explained as a document emanating from the royal administration and not from a sanctuary".[14] Line 14 of the side A seems to indicate it:

LʿBD'ŠMN RB SPRM ŠLḤ BYM Z QR 2 WQ[P' ...]

"To ʿAbdešmun, chief of the scribes, sent this day, 2 QR et [...] Q[P']"

If Abdešmun was sent by the royal palace, this would be an element that would make it possible to identify the palace's control over the temple's economy.

Previous Studies and Interpretations

From the CIS (1881) to the most recent studies, the translation of this line remains debated.

In 1867, the authors of the CIS read LRʿM . 'Š B[...] PLKD QR 2 'Š B[....[15] They do not provide a translation, but note a parallelism in construction around the relative pronoun 'Š and a possible link with the root LKD attested in Biblical Hebrew with the meaning of "to catch" in the paʿal stem.[16] The translation of LKD has persisted to this day.[17] In 1903, G. A. Cooke reads LRʿM . 'Š B??P LKD QR 2 'Š B[... , which he translates as "to the friends (?) who ... were taken (?), QR 2 which ...".[18] In 1907, M. Lidzbarski gives a similar reading, proposing to translate RʿM as 'shepherd' while not commenting on the rest of the line. In 1964, the authors of the KAI read LᶠRᶾʿM . 'Š B[..]P LKD QR 2 'Š B[... .[19] They propose two possibilities for LRʿM: "companions" or "shepherds". In the latest edition of the KAI (2002), they slightly modify their reading to: LᶠRᶾʿM . 'Š BᶠDŠᶾPLKD QR 2 'Š B[KT. In 1966, A. van den Branden proposes an original reading that has not been adopted. He reads LRʿM . 'Š BSFL KR QR 2 'Š B[... which he translates as "per i compagni che sono nella sala della vasca, qr II; che (sono) in [... ".[20] He interprets the space between what he reads as a *samek* and a *pe* as a gap and understands it as the trace of an erased sign. In 1968, B. Peckham reads LRʿM . 'Š BDŠP LKD QR 2 'Š BK[... translating it as "for the shepherds who caught in traps 2 qr; who [...] in [...]".[21] He translates LKD based on the same parallel in biblical Hebrew, and ŠP, based on the root ŠWP, as "trap". He is the first to recognize the two prepositions BD. In 1971, M. Sznycer reads the line as: LRʿM . 'Š BDḤP LKD QR 2 'Š BK[... and proposes the following translation: "For the shepherds who stopped

14 Hermary 2013, 97.
15 CIS 86.
16 Köhler et Baumgartner 1994, 530. The authors of the CIS mention the meaning of *sorte electi sunt*, known in the nifal stem.
17 Hoftijzer et Jongeling 1995, 577.
18 NSI 20.
19 KAI 37.
20 Van den Branden 1966, 252.
21 Peckham 1968, 309-10

Bod-Ḥapi, 2 QR – (the shepherds) who are in K[...".[22] In 1972, in collaboration with O. Masson, M. Sznycer suggests rendering LRʿM with "shepherds" or "companions" and mentions the possibility of reading LKD.[23] In 1974, J. F. Healey proposes LRʿM . ʾŠ BRŠP LKD QR 2 ʾŠ B[...] translating it as "for the shepherds who were chosen by Reshef, qr // ʾŠ B[... ".[24] In 1977, Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo reads L⌜R⌝ʿM . ʾŠ B⌜DŠ⌝PLKD QR 2 ʾŠ BK[T (?).[25] In 1979, E. Puech proposes reading RʿM ʾŠ B--PLQD ʾŠ BK[T. He notes the parallelism in construction and questions the possibility of restoring RŠPLKD, which he interprets as possibly referring to a district of the city.[26] The same year, M. Delcor offers both translations, "shepherds" and "companions," but emphasizes the importance of shepherds in the temple economy. In 1982, J. Gibson reads LRʿM . ʾŠ BD-PLKD QR 2 ʾŠ B⌜K⌝[T, which he translates as "to the shepherds who (live) in D-PLKD, 2 QR; (to those) who (live) in Ki[tion".[27] He also suggests that D-PLKD is a place name.

There are two main difficulties concerning these propositions:

– The first concerns the term RʿM. On the basis of the other Semitic parallels, it can be translated as "companions" as well as "shepherds."
– The second is the PLKD sequence. Most authors have chosen to understand the P as part of the preceding word and to see the root LKD as meaning "to catch," especially animals, as attested in Biblical Hebrew.

A Revised reading

The reading proposed here is based on the photographs of the *CIS*, those of B. Peckham and especially on the images recently published on the British Museum website[28] (fig. 1). The following is the proposed new reading:

(5) LRʿM . ʾŠ BD ⌜⌝ PLKD QR 2 ʾŠ B⌜D⌝[...]

I suggest reading the *dalet* in the expression ʾŠ BD, although the upper part of the sign is not perfectly drawn. Although the CIS and B. Peckham illustrations suggest a sign between the *dalet* and the *pe*, the images from the British Museum raise questions about it. Is it a sign, a word divider, or just an imperfection of the tablet?

22 M. Sznycer dans Dupont-Sommer 1971, 156.
23 Masson et Sznycer 1972, 38-41.
24 Healey 1974, 57.
25 Kition III, C1.
26 Puech 1979, 33-34
27 TSSI III, 127-28.
28 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1880-0710-44.

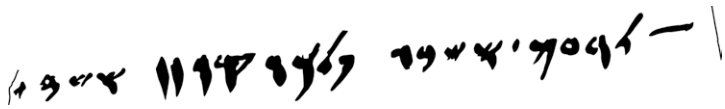

Figure 1 : Fac-similé of the line 8 (side B) of the Kition Accounts (© Stevens Bernardin).

The ugaritic parallel

Previous readings encountered the same challenge: the absence of parallels, which the new reading overcomes thanks to attestations in the Ugaritic administrative texts. Several passages show striking similarities with the translation of line 8 on side B of the Kition plaque, particularly KTU 4.374:[29]

1. *r*ʿ*ym . dt . bd . ʾiytlm*

   Shepherds "in the hands of" *ʾiytlm*

2. *ḫyrn . w . śġrh* ...

   ḫyrn and his assistant ...

The following lines list the various shepherds "in the hands of" *ʾiytlm*. The status of this individual and the nature of his connection to the shepherds—presumably those under his authority—remain uncertain, as the preposition *bd* is semantically broad.[30] In administrative contexts, however, it can denote a relationship of oversight or responsibility.[31] While *ʾiytlm's* exact role vis-à-vis these shepherds cannot be established, the passage provides a clear parallel supporting the interpretation proposed for line 8 on side B of the Kition text. If this comparison is accepted, the Kition inscription would likewise refer to shepherds under the authority of PLKD. This interpretation would, in turn, support understanding *PLKD* not as a title or designation but as a personal name.

Identification of PLKD as a Greek Anthroponym

If PLKD is to be understood as a personal name, it may be interpreted as a Greek anthroponym, specifically Philokedes.[32] This name, well known in Greek documentation,

29 RS 18.082 = KTU 4.374 (PRU V, n°72 ; McGeough 2011, 257-58).

30 DULAT, p. 211–213.

31 A synthesis of all these meaning can be read in McGeough 2011, 13-24.

32 The transcription of Philokedes by PLKD does not pose a problem. While traditionally, the equivalence of Greek *kappa* for Phoenician/Punic *qof* is made, it should be noted that many examples nuance this "rule". See Amadasi Guzzo et Bonnet 1991, 21.

especially in Attica, has not yet been attested in Cyprus.[33] It is noteworthy, however,that several Greek names beginning with Philo- are attested in Greek documents from Cyprus.[34] An occurrence of Philokedes in the Kition inscription would therefore constitute both the first attestation of this name on the island and the first Greek anthroponym recorded in the Kition accounts. Such a development is not unexpected: Greek personal names are well represented in the Phoenician corpus of Cyprus throughout the first millennium,[35] as shown by the ostraca discovered at Kition between 2021 and 2023, which mention individuals named Philos or Protokrates.[36]

Conclusion

The Kition Accounts confirm that shepherds formed part of the professionals contributing to the cultic process, alongside singers, bakers, builders, and other temple personnel. The new reading proposed here—supported by the Ugaritic parallel—suggests that these shepherds were not attached to a divine domain but operated "under the authority" (BD) of an individual, plausibly Philokedes.

This interpretation highlights that smaller cultic structures did not necessarily maintain permanent specialized staff but could rely on external professionals engaged for specific tasks. In this context, shepherds appear as providers of an essential resource temporarily mobilized for ritual needs, occupying a clearly defined yet non-institutionalized role within the Phoenician cultic economy.

Abbreviations

CAD	Roth, Martha T., éd. 1956–2010. The Assyrian dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. 21 vol. Chicago, Germany: Oriental Institute.
CIS	Commission du Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, 1867–1962. « Pars prima : Inscriptiones Phoenicias continens ». In Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Paris: Reipublicae typographeo : C. Klincksieck.
DNWSI	Jean, Charles-François, et Jacob Hoftijzer. 1965. Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'Ouest. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
DULAT	Olmo Lete, Gregorio del, Joaquín Sanmartín, et Wilfred G. E. Watson. 2015. A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition. Third Revised Edition. 2 vol. Handbook of Oriental Studies.

33 This anthroponym has more than a dozen attestations in the ancient Greek documentation. On this subject, see Fraser 1987 and its digital version (https://www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk).

34 Cannavò 2011, 562; Scarpanti 2014.

35 Amadasi Guzzo et Bonnet 1991, 13-14.

36 Briquel Chatonnet et al. 2025.

	Section 1, The Near and Middle East ; Handbuch Der Orientalistik 112. Leiden ; Boston: Brill.
KAI	Donner, Herbert, et Wolfgang Röllig. 1964. Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften. Band II. Kommentar. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
KB V	Yon, Marguerite. 2004. *Kition dans les textes : « testimonia » littéraires et épigraphiques et « corpus » des inscriptions*. Kition-Bamboula, V. Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations.
KI	Lidzbarski, Mark. 1907. Kanaanäische inschriften (moabitisch, althebräisch, phönizisch, punisch). Giessen: A. Töpelmann.
Kition III	Amadasi Guzzo, Maria Giulia, et Vassos Karageorghis. 1977. *Fouilles de Kition III. Inscriptions phéniciennes*. Cyprus.
KTU	Dietrich, Manfried, Oswald Loretz, et Joaquín Sanmartín, éd. 2013. *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani und anderen Orten*. Alter Orient und Altes Testament 360/1. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.
NSI	Cooke, George Albert. 1903. A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions: Moabite, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Jewish. The Clarendon Press.
PRU V	Schaeffer, Claude, et Claude Virolleaud. 1965. Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit, volume V : Textes en cunéiformes alphabétiques des archives sud, sud-ouest et du petit palais. Mission de Ras Shamra 11. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale & Klincksieck.
TSSI	Gibson, John C. L. 1982. *Textbook of Syrian Semitic inscriptions. Volume 3: Phoenician inscriptions including inscriptions in the mixed dialect of Arslan Tash*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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The Non-Priestly Staff of the Jerusalem Temple in the Persian Period (Gatekeepers, *Netinim*, Sons of Solomon's Servants, Temple Singers)[1]

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Opening Remarks

This chapter is a revised and expanded version of the papers that both authors presented in Wrocław on September 26–27, 2024 on the occasion of the 23rd Melammu Workshop: *Serving the Gods. Artists, Craftsmen and Ritual Specialists in the Ancient World*. The topic of the conference, which deliberately focused on ritual specialists and diverted the attention from priestly roles, gave us the opportunity to focus on four groups usually referred to as 'lower' temple staff which according to biblical sources were associated with the temple in Jerusalem during the Persian period. Some themes touched upon in the talks have not found their way into this synthesis, while some others have been further elaborated.[2] The purpose of this chapter is a tentative historical reconstruction of the real-life groups of people in the province of Persian time Yehud who engaged in formal relations with the centre in the Jerusalem temple. For this reason the reliability of the sources, which has often been questioned,[3] must be taken into account as a preliminary step.

The main sources related to the realities of the province of Yehud in the Persian period are the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Both these books contain lists (Ezra 2 / Nehemiah 7) of alleged displaced people from Mesopotamia to Palestine. We say alleged displaced people as the historical value of these lists, both in terms of numbers, proper

1 This chapter was written within the frame of the project "The Dawn of Monotheism?", financed by the National Science Centre (NCN), Poland (UMO-2020/39/G/HS3/02059). We would like to express our sincere thanks to Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider and Bernard Schneider, the organisers of the workshop, and the editors of this volume for their kind invitation.

2 One of the authors is preparing a contribution tracing a comparison between the biblical *netinim* and the Babylonian *širku*s (unfree temple workers), and the other author plans to publish an article on the historical origins of Levites in the Persian period.

3 See recently, e.g., Fried 2020, who argues that the book of Nehemiah displays historical accuracy, at least in its portrayal of Persian authorities and their policies.

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names, and the whole historical context is not clear and is often disputed.[4] In the community of the returnees as it presented in the lists there are five special categories that fall within our field of interest: the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the *netinim* together with the sons of Solomon's servants. The book of Ezra indicates the total numbers of men who returned from the Babylonian captivity to Yehud, giving a figure of 42,360 (Ezra 2:64). These men were to be accompanied by male and female slaves, male and female singers. A list with the numbers in each group shows the following:

Priests – 973 (Ezra 2:36; cf. Neh 7:39)
Levites – 74 (Ezra 2:40; cf. Neh 7:43)
Singers – 128 (Ezra 2:41; cf. Neh 7:44)
Gatekeepers – 139 (Ezra 2:42; cf. Neh 7:45)
Netinim and sons of Solomon's servants – 392 (Ezra 2:43–58; cf. Neh 7:46.57.60)

Archaeologists estimate, based on the number and size of inhabited settlement sites, that no more than 30,000 people lived in the province of Yehud at the end of the Persian period.[5] In that time, the population of Jerusalem alone could not have exceeded 1,200 people.[6] These figures, even if the estimates are not always reliable, show the scale of the population at the time in broad terms. Considering that roughly half of the population were women, the number of men in the whole province (included kids and elders) may have been ca. 15,000. Hence, the numbers given in the book of Ezra are completely unlikely, and cannot be used as they are as a starting point for any appraisal.

However, while clearly exaggerated, these numbers can still prove heuristically useful to orient a further investigation into the aforementioned categories of temple staff. In particular, it is the large number of priests that catches the attention. Ezra 2 gives a 4:3 ratio of priests to the rest of the non-priestly temple staff. This ratio belies our intuition, which would have the priests as a privileged class and a small elite, while the non-priestly groups performed lesser, menial tasks in relation to, and in support of, this elevated group.[7] This apparent discrepancy provides an opportunity to once again question our knowledge about the operation and organization of the newly rebuilt Jerusalem temple in Persian period Yehud. The following chapter will focus on the functions and roles of three among

4 The passages present many text-critical and exegetical issues. Generally speaking, the two lists are similar to each other and to a third one in 1Esd 5, yet not identical: there are several differences in the orthographies of the anthroponyms in the Hebrew versions, and in some cases the Greek versions add more names but miss others that are featured in the Hebrew text. For a close examination see Bortz 2018, 16–61. For a recent attempt to text-critically make sense of the different versions of the lists see Segal 2023; cf. Zadok 2012 for a prosopographically-oriented comparative analysis of the lists. For a tentative reconstruction of the historical background of the lists based on archeological evidence, see Finkelstein 2008. His arguments, while not conclusive, point towards a late Hellenistic (Hasmonean) background. On the basis of the same data, Zevit 2009 argues instead for a late 6th c. background.

5 Lipschits 2024.

6 See the recent discussion and the survey of former literature in Eskenazi 2023, 15–9.

7 Cf., e.g., Schaper 2000, 280–1.

the non-priestly groups attached to the temple service – gatekeepers, *netinim* with sons of Solomon's servants, and temple singers – testing traditional scholarly understandings of these groups and their activities against a re-evaluation of the available biblical evidence.

Gatekeepers (שערים)

The term שערים *šōʿărîm* is related to the noun meaning 'gate' (*šaʿar*). The meaning of the term *šōʿar* / *šōʿărîm* can be reconstructed on the basis of analogies from other Semitic languages. In Punic inscriptions it occurs as 'porter', 'door-keeper', and in the form *rab šoʿar* as 'the chief of the doorkeepers'. In one Palmyrenian inscription it occurs in an obscure sense; a proposed tentative rendering is 'manager of the practical side of religious feast'.[8] Accordingly, the translators of the LXX using the word πυλωρὸς attributed to the Hebrew term the meaning of "gate-keeper", "warder", "porter".[9]

Beyond these lexical remarks, however, it is important to see what kind of competences and expertises were attributed to these 'gatekeepers', especially in the context of the sanctuary. The term appears in the Hebrew Bible in dozens of places, most commonly in 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. We know that they came from among the Levites (1Chr 9:18–23. 26; 2Chr 8:14; 31:14; 34:13). They are commonly assigned tasks related to the temple, e. g.:

> He stationed the gatekeepers at the gates of the house of YHWH so that no one should enter who was in any way unclean (2Chr 23:19).

Nehemiah 7:1 reports:

> Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed.

Knoppers, discussing the occurrences of references to gatekeepers in Chronicles, believes that they fulfilled mainly a martial and police force role:

> In discussing the gatekeepers (…) scholars have paid much more attention to questions of composition than to questions of vocation. Some have viewed the gatekeepers in Chronicles as minor clerical functionaries. (…) In recent years, another view has come to the fore, presenting the gatekeepers as an important 'paramilitary inner-city security force' (…) The letter view is, in my judgement, closer to the mark because it has evidentiary support elsewhere in Chronicles and parallels in ancient Near East lore. As we shall see, gatekeepers perform multiple functions, but the martial aspect is prominent. (…) In Chronicles this security force fulfils a variety

8 DNWSI, 1179–80.
9 GELS, *s.v.*; cf. LSJ, *s.v.*

> of administrative functions – guard duty, revenue collection, temple repair, and revenue disbursement. As such, the gatekeepers are critical to temple stewardship and are portrayed positively. (Knoppers 2004b, 871; 873)

There are also pieces of evidence suggesting that the gatekeepers lived in various settlements and cities and therefore outside Jerusalem. This is explicitly mentioned in Neh 7:73 and 1Chr 9:22:

> Now the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the *netinim*, and all Israel *lived in their cities*. (Neh 7:73)
> Those who were chosen to be gatekeepers at the thresholds were 212 in all. They were registered by genealogy *in their settlements*, those whom David and Samuel the seer appointed in their official capacity. (1Chr 9:22)

Their distribution outside Jerusalem, if their tasks were to be carried out at the city walls or at the central sanctuary, may be surprising. Following Knoppers' view of the gatekeepers mainly as a guard service, two possible conclusions are possible. Either this is a force operating both in Jerusalem and in the province (this, however, remains only a speculative version, since there is no direct source data to support such an interpretation), or this could be a force deployed in different places, which came to Jerusalem only as a kind of term service to fulfil its tasks. Support for the second of these interpretations can be found in 1 Chronicles:

> The gatekeepers were on the four sides, to the east, west, north, and south. Their relatives in their settlements *were* to come in every seven days from time to time *to be* with them; for the four chief gatekeepers, who *were* Levites, *served* in an official capacity. (1Chr 9:24–26)

Leaving aside for a moment the consideration of the whereabouts of gatekeepers, however, it should be noted that we also have testimonies that portray them attached to tasks other than those of the police.[10] Three passages are important in this regard:

> Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates. (Neh 12:25)
> Kore, the son of Imnah the Levite, the keeper of the eastern gate, was in charge of the voluntary offerings for God, to distribute the contributions for YHWH and the most holy things. (2Chr 31:14) [הַשּׁוֹעֵר לַמִּזְרָחָה lit.: *haššôʿēr* of the East / Eastern; LXX*:* ὁ πυλωρὸς κατὰ ἀνατολὰς]
> Their [gatekeepers] relatives in their settlements were to come in every seven days from time to time to be with them; for the four chief gatekeepers, who were Levites,

10 Cf. Kim 2014, 39–51.

> served in an official capacity, and were in charge of the chambers and in charge of the treasuries in the house of God. They spent the night around the house of God, because the watch was committed to them; and they were in charge of opening it morning by morning. (1Chr 9:25–27)

As it can be seen, one of their responsibilities concerns matters relating to offerings. The passage in 1Chr 26:15 makes it explicit in this context:

> For Obed-edom it fell to the south, and to his sons was allotted the storehouse.

Additionally, tasks other than ordering seem to be suggested by a rather general sentence in 2Chr 34:13:

> They were also in charge of the burden bearers, and supervised all the workmen from job to job; and some of the Levites were scribes, and officials, and gatekeepers.

It cannot be denied that the passages mentioned above do not so much point to the gatekeepers as a minor rank of priests, but rather to the staff responsible for collecting, gathering, and guarding the offerings. In the reality of the province of Yehud, such offerings were one of the main sources of income for the temple and its staff.

It is worth noting at this point the passage in 1Chr 26:15 about storehouses. The expression used here is *bêt hā'ăsūppîm*, literally 'house of gathering', from the root **'sp* 'to gather'. The term appears only three times in the Bible, in 1Chr 26 15; 17 and Neh 12:25. Becking argues that the passage in Nehemiah is a later interpolation.[11] Fried, in her commentary on this point, states:

> Guards at the collection points at the gates. This is an interesting bit of description of the administration of ancient Jerusalem. The gates served as a collection points—of donations, of letters. A cache of letters as well as numerous bullae used to seal them was found, for example, beneath the debris of the pre-exilic city gate at Lachish, indicating the important role that the city gate had in antiquity. It is likely that the collection points at the gates to the temple precincts are referred to here, rather than the gates of the city. (Fried 2021, 336)

Of particular interest, however, is how these terms were rendered in the LXX.

> Esd 22:25 (= Neh 12:25): ἐν τῷ συναγαγεῖν με τοὺς πυλωροὺς [When I gathered the porters]
> 1Chr 26:15: τῷ Ἀβδεδὸμ Νότον κατέναντι οἴκου ἐσεφίν [To Abdedom (they gave by the lot) the South, opposite the house of Esephin]

11 Becking 2018, 305.

> 1Chr 26:17: πρὸς ἀνατολὰς ἕξ τὴν ἡμέραν, βορρᾶ τῆς ἡμέρας τέσσαρες, νότον τῆς ἡμέρας τέσσαρες, καὶ εἰς τὸν ἐσεφὶν [Eastward were six watchmen in the day: northward four by the day; southward four by the day; and two at the Esephin]

The translators of the LXX probably did not understand what *bêt hā'ăsūppîm* was, and thus they transliterated the word. There are therefore gatekeepers associated with a place where certain products were stored, and the evidence suggests that these storehouses were located near the gates. Furthermore, since there were individuals acting as superiors of gatekeepers (1Chr 9:18), it must have been an internally stratified, hierarchical structure, and the tasks they carried out were somehow distributed, i.e., differentiated in terms of competence. Certainly they were not exclusively responsible for the task of opening and closing the gates.

At this point it seems reasonable to ask if the straightforward meaning of *šō'ar* / *šō'ărîm* related to guarding the traffic at the gates, especially the city gates, explain their connection to the temple staff in the Jerusalem temple. How do we square at the same time the high status of these people, as evidenced by the records exempting them from taxes (Ezra 7:24)?[12] There is a temptation here to give a slightly different understanding of the term in the context of the province of Yehud in the Persian period. We venture the hypothesis that the *šō'ărîm* are related to the gates only because this was the place where they performed their activities, but they actually had little to do with guarding the gates. Indeed, some biblical passages might hint to activities related to the circulation of goods. It is worth recalling here both the verb *šā'ar*, in the sense of 'to calculate, to reckon' (*hapax legomenon* in Prov 23:7) and the noun *še'arîm* in Gen 26:12 meaning a certain unit of measurement:

> Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold, and YHWH blessed him" [שְׁעָרִים מֵאָה; lit.: a hundred measures].[13]

The passages mentioned above are also compatible with an understanding of the function of those functionaries linked to the gates as tax and revenue officers. The term *šō'ărîm* itself was coined from the activity performed at the gates, i.e., 'to estimate value', 'calculate', and should thus be rendered along the lines of 'toll-collectors'.

Dealing with the absolute dating of biblical texts is extremely controversial, and there is no chance of a universal scholarly consensus. However, it is worth noting that the gatekeepers and their role in the economic life, as well as the existence of a place called *bêt hā'ăsūppîm*, are not attested in many biblical passages. Indeed, they are absent in Samuel-Kings and Ezra-Nehemiah, but appear in the time of the authors of Chronicles. Furthermore, the concepts associated with them are no longer known to the translators of the LXX. Therefore it might be argued – without venturing absolute dates – that the institution of gatekeepers as related to the affairs of the temple's economical life appeared at the end of the Persian period, and disappeared by the Hellenistic period.

12 On this exemption see further below.

13 LXX and some versions read 'barley' (κριθήν; Heb. שְׂעֹרִים), but MT seems preferable. See Westermann 1985, 422.

The fact that in Ezra and Nehemiah the lists of temple functionaries are linked together – priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, and others – shows that they formed a certain coherent group. They are also covered by the tax exemption (Ezra 7:24), which shows that in the view of the biblical authors they constituted a privileged group attached to the Jerusalem temple. Given the functions performed by the gatekeepers, this whole group could be seen not only as personnel working in a place of worship, but as the internally diverse staff of an economic institution. The singers and priests certainly fulfilled some cult-related roles, but the others also fulfilled their tasks outside Jerusalem, and some of these tasks were not related to worship at all, but to economic matters. Even if they had an indirect influence on the sacrifices offered in Jerusalem, they must be considered temple staff delegated to economic functions rather than cultic activity.

This understanding of the gatekeepers as collectors of taxes, or tolls, and voluntary offerings would explain their association with storehouses, and with high social status. This picture would further substantiate a view of the Jerusalem temple not only as a place of worship but, in a similar fasion as the Mesopotamian temples, as an important institution in the economic life of the province of Yehud.

Netinim (נתינים) and Sons of Solomon's Servants (בני עבדי שלמה)

The נתינים (*nətînîm*, henceforth *netinim*) are mentioned eighteen times in the Bible following the Hebrew text, always in the plural as a collective, and always in writings dated to the post-exilic period. Seventeen mentions are found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 2:43.58.70; 7:7.24; 8:17.20 x2; Neh 3:26.31; 7:46.60.73; 10:28; 11:3.21 x2), and a last one in 1Chr 9:2.[14] Most notably, the *netinim* are mentioned in the lists of the first returnees from Babylon in Yehud after the Edict of Cyrus (539), both in Ezra 2 and in Nehemiah 7. As a group, the *netinim* appear here at the bottom of the lists, after the priests and the three other groups of non-priestly temple staff: the Levites, the musicians/singers, and the gatekeepers. They are tightly linked to another body of people, the בני עבדי שלמה (*bənê ʿabdê Šəlōmōh*, 'sons of Solomon's servants'), attested five times in total, only in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 2:55.58; Neh 7:57.60; 11.3). In fact, even if the genealogies of the two groups are listed separately, their numbers are counted together (Ezra 2:58; Neh 7:60) and amount to 392 in total.[15] Another group of 220 *netinim* from Casiphia is said to have joined Ezra's mission on the way to Jerusalem on the latter's appeal (Ezra 8:20), in the seventh year of king Ar-

14 Ezra 7:24 has the Aramaic form נתיניא. The *qere* הַמְּבִינִים in 2Chr 35:3 and its parallel ἱεροδούλοι in 1Esd 1:3 might point towards a reading נתינים. See Haran 1961, 165 fn1; Böhler 2016, 24. The number of attestations changes slightly in the Greek textual tradition as there is no parallel passage to MT Neh 11:21. The *netinim* are also mentioned in Qumranic and Rabbinic writings; see Knoppers 2004a, 501 for a general overview of this material.

15 For this reason Fried 2017, 149 suggested that they were in fact one group, and that *bənê ʿabdê Šəlōmōh* is just an editorial gloss to explain the unfamiliar term *netinim*.

taxerxes.[16] Current biblical scholarship usually understands *netinim* and sons of Solomon's servants as low-ranking members of the temple-staff working for the temple in the city of Jerusalem, sometimes depicted as servants or 'slaves', and probably devoted to menial tasks such as craftmanship, building activities, livestock farming, and husbandry in support of the cultic infrastructure.[17] However, this picture is grounded in assumptions that are beset by difficulties and can be reasonably challenged, starting with the very meaning of their names. In fact, differently from the other two groups dealt with in this chapter, the designations *netinim* and *bənê ʿabdê Šəlōmōh* are not immediately helpful in determining what their function and role were within the cult or the economy of the temple.

The designation *bənê ʿabdê Šəlōmōh* has a transparent literal meaning, 'sons (i.e., descendants) of Solomon's servants', but it does not disclose any substantial information about the activities of this body of people. Interestingly, however, the LXX is not internally consistent in the renderings. Esd 2:55.58 have a partially transliterated form υἱοὶ Αβδησελμα, while Esd 17:57.60; 21:3 have the translation υἱοὶ δούλων Σαλωμων.[18] The form *netinim* is a deverbal formation from the root **ntn* 'to give', 'to assign', 'to allow'. A passive connotation is usually ascribed to this term, resulting in a meaning along the lines of '(those who are/have been) given', 'dedicated', 'bestowed'. Such meaning is usually explained on the basis of a single biblical passage, i.e., the gloss in Ezra 8:20. This passage mentions the 220 *netinim* from Casiphia and states that "David and his officials had given (*nātan*) [them] to attend the Levites",[19] thus projecting their origin back to the time of David's kingdom. However, this is most probably a later gloss with a clear aetiological purpose, displaying the Chronicler's vision that systematically traces the founding of temple offices to David's charter, while *netinim* and Levites are clearly kept apart from each other in the lists in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7.[20] Consequently, it cannot be taken at face value in an assessment of the historical reality of the *netinim* standing behind the biblical picture.[21]

16 Usually this is interpreted as referring to Artaxerxes I Mnemon, i.e., in 458/57 BCE. For the alternate dating of Ezra's mission to the reign of Artaxerxes II Longimanus (465–424/23) see recently Fogielman 2024.

17 See, e.g., the classic and long influential views of Wellhausen 1883, 153; Baudissin 1889, 142–3, and more recently ABD 4, *s.v.*; Becking 2018, 42–3; EBR 21, 217–20; Eskenazi 2023, 171–2. A notable exception to this trend is Weinberg 1975 (= Weinberg 1992, 75–91), who understands both groups not as temple staff, but rather as the post-exilic remnants of craftsmen and hand workers employed by the royal court in pre-exilic times.

18 Cf. 1Esd 5:33: υἱοὶ παίδων Σαλωμων.

19 BHS and Blenkinsopp 1988, 164 notice the inconsistency between the two subjects and the III mp form נתן, and read מְשֹׁרְתִים in place of MT הַשָּׁרִים, thus rendering "whom David had assigned *as ministers*"; cf. BHQ.

20 Schaper 2000, 280–1; 290. *Contra* Leuchter 2010, 588–90. On David as archetypical cult-founder see further De Vries 1988.

21 Haran 1961, 165 fn1; Fensham 1982, 115; Blenkinsopp 1988, 167. The presence of a late hand in Ezra 8:20 is also betrayed by the use of the relative particle שֶׁ, *pace* Williamson 1985, 117. According to Pakkala 2004, 59–63, the whole digression relating the search for Levites in Casiphia (Ezra 8:15b-20) is a later expansion added to highlight the relevance of Levites in the context of Ezra's mission. In this scenario, Ezra 8:20 (נתינים ... שנתן) would be an even later addition in the Chronicler's spirit. See

Alternatively, we could infer that the collective act of 'giving' implied by the term *netinim* must have as recipient either the deity (YHWH), or the temple service itself. In fact, the root **ntn* is used in a wide array of cultic circumstances,[22] including the dedication of people to particular offices (Num 31:47; Josh 9:27), the annexation of the Levites into the Aaronides (Num 3:9; 8:19), and their dedication to the liturgical offices related to the tabernacle (Num 8:16; 18:6; 1Chr 6:33; cf. Deut 28:32). In these cases, the Levites are said to be 'given' (*nətûnim*) to the Aaronides or to the tabernacle. However, it is not warranted to attach *eo ipso* a passive nuance to the term *netinim*; indeed, several observations call for a more cautious stance. Previous scholarship has always failed to address the issue raised by the morphological difference between *netinim* and the regular form of the masch. plur. of the passive past participle נתונים (*nətûnim*).[23] As a *qatil* participial formation, the term *netinim* retains some passive connotations, but it simply denotes duration in their state of individuals related to the temple, rather than indicating the objects of an act of dedication.[24] This distinction is not trivial, and its relevance is highlighted by two points. First, very often the form *nətûnim* does not occur in isolation, but rather in constructions with other words derived from the same root **ntn*,[25] whereas *netinim* – except for the aforementioned gloss in Ezra 8:20 – is always attested as a stand-alone term. Second, *netinim* always occurs accompanied by the definite article – except again in Ezra 8:20. This suggests a regularly substantivized use of this term to identify a definite group of people, whereas *nətûnim* is always used predicatively without article.

Apart from morphological similarities, two biblical passages are often called upon to argue in favor of a connection between *nətûnim* and *netinim*, but neither of them is without difficulty. LXX 1Chr 9:2 is a particularly significant passage, because it is the only instance in the Greek text where *netinim* is translated with the participle δεδομένοι

also Fried 2017, 352. For a recent overview of the theories of the compilation of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah see Harrington 2022, 21–2.

22 DCH 5, 811a; TDOT 10, 102–7. Cf. Phoenician *ytn* 'dedicate' in a funerary inscription from Pyrgi (Knoppers 1992, 112–3). Some dictionaries also mention the term *ntyn'* / *ntwn'* in an Aramaic inscription from Hatra (H 21:1) as a correlate. See DNSWI, 766; DULAT[3], 977. Despite the tempting similitude, especially considered the epigraphic uncertainty on the mater *y*/*w* (see Krückmann 1952/53, 147 fn54), this word should be clearly read with the following *šry'* as a single word *ntwn'šry'*, the toponym for Adiabene; see Marcato 2018, 35 fn35.

23 JM §50c. Only Speiser 1963, 72 stresses in passing the semantic distinction between the verbal meaning of נתונים as a passive participle and the term *netinim* as a more technical designation of a role or occupation.

24 GKC2 §84al. Curiously enough, pre-modern scholarship had glimpsed alternative meanings for *netinim* with no passive undertones. Forster 1557, 532 ascribes the origin of the name to the fact that they gave or handed over to the priests all things needed to administer the cult ("sacerdotibus necessaria suppeditarent, a dando seu porrigendo"). Will 1745, 7 reports older views according to which the term should imply a self-dedication to the temple service, and should thus be translated as *dantes sese* 'self-givers'.

25 Speiser 1963, who also draws a comparison with the Akkadian terminology for dedications.

instead of being transliterated as ναθινιν, ναθινιμ, or ναθιναῖοι.[26] The use of the middle diathesis in this one occurrence would apparently suggest a passive meaning for *netinim*. However, this passage is fraught with difficulties. 1Chr 9:2 is the only undisputed place in 1–2 Chronicles[27] that mentions the *netinim*. Either if we assume, with many scholars, a textual dependency of 1Chr 9 from Neh 11, or rather a common dependency of the two texts from an earlier source,[28] it is clear that the *netinim* do not play otherwise any role in the organization of the cult and in the ranks of the temple staff described in Chronicles. Several reasons make it plausible that the LXX based its translation here on the word *nətûnim* rather than *netinim*. First, δεδομένοι is the standard LXX rendering of Hebrew *nətûnim* in its every other occurrence in the biblical texts, including 1Chr 6:33.[29] It would have been counterintuitive to use the same term δεδομένοι for *netinim*, especially if their existence is not considered anywhere else in Chronicles. Second, in all instances but one (Deut 28:32), the term *nətûnim*/δεδομένοι is always referred to Levites. The proximity of Levites in 1Chr 9:2 as well might therefore have facilitated a confusion between *netinim* and *nətûnim*. Third, such confusion might stem from a palaeographical reason, i.e., a close similarity of *yod* and *waw* (י and ו) in a Hebrew *Vorlage*.[30]

The second passage usually used to argue in favor of a link between *nətûnim* and *netinim* is Ezra 8:17, where MT has *qere* הַנְּתִינִים and *ketiv* הנתונים, establishing a direct link between the two terms. Let us consider the verse in the parallel versions of MT and LXX.

וָאֲצַוֶּה אוֹתָם עַל־אִדּוֹ הָרֹאשׁ בְּכָסְפְיָא הַמָּקוֹם וָאָשִׂימָה בְּפִיהֶם דְּבָרִים לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אִדּוֹ אָחִיו הנתונים בְּכָסְפְיָא הַמָּקוֹם לְהָבִיא־לָנוּ מְשָׁרְתִים לְבֵית אֱלֹהֵינוּ:

καὶ ἐξήνεγκα αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ ἄρχοντος ἐν ἀργυρίῳ τοῦ τόπου καὶ ἔθηκα ἐν στόματι αὐτῶν λόγους λαλῆσαι πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτῶν τοὺς ναθινιμ ἐν ἀργυρίῳ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἐνέγκαι ἡμῖν ἄδοντας εἰς οἶκον θεοῦ ἡμῶν

26 Esd 2:58: ναθινιν. Esd 2:70; 7:7.24; 8:17.20 (x2); 13:26; 31 (Βηθαναθινιμ); 17:46.60.73; 20:29: ναθινιμ. Esd 2:43; 21:3: ναθιναῖοι. For minor (mainly vocalic) variants in the Greek mss. see the convenient overview in Cheyne 1902, 3397–400. In 1Esdras the standard equivalent for *netinim* is ἱεροδούλοι: 1Esd 5:29.35; 8: 5.22.48. The same term is also used by Josephus (*Ant. Jud.* 11.3.10 §70; 11.5.1 §128; 11.5.2 §134), but this use already reflects the overlay of a Hellenistic cultural concept onto the biblical texts. See Haran 1961, 169; Cohen 2000, 59 fn9; Böhler 2016, 24; cf. TDOT 10, 105.

27 Cf. above, footnote 14 on 2Chr 35:3.

28 Arguing for the first option, Japhet 1993, 208 states that the *netinim* are "no more than the inadvertent survival of a textual detail from Neh. 11". This would be confirmed by the fact the Chronicler misses the following mention of the *netinim* in Neh 11:21. For an argument in favor of a common source of 1Chr and Neh 11 see Knoppers 2000, with a convenient summary of previous hypotheses.

29 Num 3:9: δεδομένοι; Num 8:16: ἀποδεδομένοι; Num 8:19 δεδομένους; Num 18:6: δεδομένον. Cf. Deut 28:32: δεδομέναι (daughters).

30 Different *lectiones* in the ancient versions also hints at an early confusion in this passage; see, e.g., the different renderings δεδομένοι, ναθιναῖοι, ναθίνεοι, ναοὶ νέοι, θανιναῖοι in some Hexaplaric mss. (see Field 1875, 711) and Pesh. ܓܝܝܪܐ (*gīyōr*), 'foreigners', 'aliens', 'sojourners', in place of *netinim*.

If we consider the MT in itself, there would be no particular reason to prefer the *qere* over the *ketiv*. If we read אחיו as a plural אֶחָיו ('his brothers') rather than אָחִיו ('his brother') with the support of LXX τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς, it would not make sense to envision the *netinim* as brothers of Iddo, a leader over the Levites. For this reason, many commentators reading אֶחָיו emend the text reinstating a second allegedly lost conjunction, thus translating "to Iddo, [and to] his brothers [and] the *netinim* in Casiphia".[31] However, this is unnecessary: a reading with *ketiv* would plainly give "to Iddo, [and to] his brother, dedicated in Casiphia",[32] without the need to resort to any further emendations. Such an understanding of *nətûnim* in the sense of religiously 'dedicated' individuals would support a view of Casiphia not just as a settlement, but as some kind of sanctuary or Levitic enclosure.[33] The *qere* reading might be explained as a later attempt at harmonization with the other close mentions of *netinim* in the gloss in Ezra 8:20 just below.[34] Admittedly, the *qere* has the support of LXX ναθινιμ, but an ancient misunderstanding of the Hebrew text by the translator can be easily assumed.[35] In the Greek version, the character of Iddo is removed from the story, and ἀδελφοὺς αὐτῶν ('*their* brothers', not 'his') are connected to the list of people named just above in Esd 8:16. Consequently, the translator understands the following word ναθινιμ as referred either to these brothers or to the aforementioned people,[36] again probably attracted by the other mentions of ναθινιμ in Esd 8:20 not far below.

All the arguments exposed above, significantly downplay any evidence used to back up a connection between *nətûnim* and *netinim*. This clears the way from the long-held idea that the *netinim* can only be thought of as a subservient group engaged with, or rather 'dedicated to', the cultic service within the temple precinct in the narrowest sense of the world. Indeed, Ezra 2:70 and Neh 7:73 provide evidence that the *netinim* were settled in their cities in Yehud:

> So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the *netinim*, and all Israel settled in their towns.

Neh 11:3 also adds the sons of Solomon's servants to those who settled in the cities:

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31 See discussions in Fensham 1982, 114; Williamson 1985, 113; Blenkinsopp 1988, 164; Fried 2017, 347; Eskenazi 2023, 329.

32 Williamson 1985, 113; Eskenazi 2023, 329. Cf. Leuchter 2009, 177–83; 2010, 588–90.

33 Chong 1996; TDOT 10, 106; Leuchter 2009; Fried 2017, 349–50; Eskenazi 2023, 331–2. Cf. Becking 2018, 125.

34 Signficantly, הנתונים is not included in the list of words spelled with *waw* but read with a *yod* in *b.Sof.* 7.4.

35 This would not be the only instance of this kind within this passage, since Esd 8:17 mistakes the toponym Casiphia (כספיא) with the term כסף 'silver' and translates accordingly 'ἐν ἀργυρίῳ'. The flimsiness of the textual tradition in this passage is further corroborated by the disagreement of the ancient versions. 1Esd 8:45 omits any mention of נתונים/נתינים altogether, while Pesh. has ܕܥܒܕܝ 'those who dwelt' based on נתונים, a meaning also favored by Rashi, Ezra 8:17.

36 Reading τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτῶν in the first case, τῶν ἀδελφοὺς αὐτῶν in the second. The witnesses are split as for the case of the article. See the apparatus in Hanhart 1993, 120–1.

> In the towns of Yehud all lived on their property in their towns: Israel, the priests, the Levites, the *netinim*, and the sons of Solomon's servants.

Therefore, not all *netinim* settled and resided in the 'house of the *netinim* and the merchants' (*bêt hannətînîm wəhārōkəlîm*, Neh 3:31) on the Ophel, close to the Water Gate on the eastern slope of the temple mound (Neh 3:26; 11:21). We might speculate that, since this accommodation on the Ophel is only mentioned in the context of the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem,[37] it was just a temporary housing to host those among the *netinim* who were working there at that moment. This might explain why *bêt hannətînîm* appears in the singular, implying the idea of some kind of communal dormitory rather than individual houses.[38] Alternatively, it is not impossible that only a subgroup of *netinim* were staying in the 'house' on the Ophel, namely those with Ziha and Gishpa at their head (*'al*, Neh 11:21).

The absence of any mention of the specific functions of the *netinim* and the sons of Solomon's servants, as well as their presence all over the territory of Yehud, favors a picture of them not as menial workers within the temple, but rather as segments of the civic community which could, as opposed to the common people, boast some kind of connection to the temple endeavor. To further substantiate this reassessment of the prevalent scholarly view, three closely intertwined issues need to be addressed: the historical origins of these groups, their social standing within the community of the returnees in Yehud, and the ethnic constitution and geographical provenance of their members.

To begin with, it is not possible to establish the origin of either one of the two groups before the post-exilic period. There is no positive evidence to back up this view,[39] since they are not mentioned anywhere in the biblical sources outside the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Moreover, as shown above, the LXX shows unfamiliarity with the term *netinim* and to some extent even with the sons of Solomon's servants, strengthening the idea that these groups were established and existed only in a very specific place and time, i. e., Yehud in the Persian period. The context of a new establishment of these two groups provides the rationale for the elaboration of foundational stories which tailored their antiquity, artificially linking them to a pre-exilic past to justify their existence in post-exilic times.

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37 Neh 11:21 would be an exception in this sense, but it is part of a later addition to the text of Neh 11 (vv. 21–24) and probably drawn from Neh 3:26. See Fensham 1982, 248; Blenkinsopp 1988, 326–7; Becking 2018, 298–9. Some commentators deem Neh 3:26 itself a gloss, but this is unwarranted. See Fensham 1982, 26; Williamson 1985, 198.

38 Fried 2017, 120. The same might be said for the 'house of the warriors' (*bêt haggibbōrîm*), i. e., the barracks. See Williamson 1985, 208; cf. Levine 1963, 210.

39 The name קרסי (Qerosi) in ostracon 18 from Arad (HCIBP, 119–22) from the beginning of the 6th c. BCE cannot be used as evidence of a pre-exilic origin of the *netinim*, as Levine 1969, 49–51 and Weinberg 1992, 83–6 would have. In fact, it is likely just a regular personal name, and not a gentilic designating a family of workers in the 'house of YHWH' (בית יהוה) in Arad parallel to בני־קרס in Ezra 2:44/Neh 7:47. See Fried 2017, 120–1. This is further confirmed by the presence of another personal name, חגב (Hagab) both in ostracon 1 from Lachish (6th c. BCE; HCIBP, 56–7) and Ezra 2:46, without any reference to the cult or the temple. A seal from Jerusalem, tentatively dated to the 7th c. BCE, probably belonged to an individual with the same name, judging by the inscribed letters לחגב. See Fried 2017, 122.

As already mentioned, the origin of the *netinim* is projected back to David's constitution in the gloss in Ezra 8:20. Something similar happens with singers and gatekeepers in Neh 12:46.[40] A possible yet tentative alternate origin story of the *netinim* might be glimpsed in the episode of the subjugation of the Gibeonites by Joshua, whom the Israelite leader had "dedicated (lit. 'given', *wayyittənēm*) as woodcutters and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of YHWH" (Josh 9:27). The aetiological purpose of the clause is made explicit by the standard expression *ʿad-hayyôm hazzeh*, "up to this day". Many commentators have taken at face value the historicity of this connection between Gibeonites and *netinim*, abetted by Talmudic *halakhah*.[41] However, not only the book of Joshua cannot be considered a reliable historical source, but also Joshua 9 in particular seems to reflect a post-exilic background very close to that of the list of returnees in Nehemiah 7.[42] In the case of the sons of Solomon servants, even in absence of an explicit aetiological narrative, their purported origin is suggested in their very name. They are ideal 'descendants' of the *ʿabdê Šəlōmōh* mentioned in 1Kgs 9:27. According to Levine, this is a reference not to the foreign workers enslaved by Solomon (*mas ʿōbēd*, 1Kgs 9:20), but rather to a class of free people employed by the king and engaged in mercantile activities (1Kgs 9:22; cf. 2Chr 8:18; 9:10).[43] If the name 'sons of Solomon servants' is a newly coined designation meant to display a connection to an ancient and illustrious past, then the latter option would be the likelier.

Information on the social standing of the sons of Solomon servants in the post-exilic community is inconclusive. On the one hand, they do not take part in the pact (*ʾămānâ*) signed by the community (*qāhāl*), including other groups of temple staff (Neh 10:29–30a),[44] and it is doubtful that they can be identified with the 'workers of the house of god' (*pāləḥê bêt ʾĕlāhāʾ*)[45] who received the tax and corvée exemption for the temple personnel decreed by Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:24). On the other hand, Ezra 2:64 / Neh 7:66 imply that they are included among the members of the *qāhāl*, while slaves, maidservants, and even

40 On Neh 12:46 see further below.

41 See *b.Yeb.* 78b-79a. Cf. *b.Yeb.* 71a; *b.Hor.* 4b; *b.Makk.* 13a. For classic formulations of this hypothesis see Haran 1961 and Grintz 1966. The former envisioned the Gibeonites as one of several different ethnical groups that merged into the group of *netinim* over a long period of time. See also Blenkinsopp 1988, 90; Day 2007, 134–7.

42 Dozeman 2015, 414–5. Fried 2005, 87 fn23 reconstructs Neh 10:29–30a as a later addition by a redactor in the context of the stipulation of the pact (*ʾămānâ*) in the community of returnees (*qāhāl*). This would reflect on the one hand the fact that the *netinim*, as well as other categories of temple staff, were originally not considered full members of the community (cf. Ezra 2:64), as they did not swear an oath to follow the Mosaic law, and they did not sign the *ʾămānâ*. On the other hand, this gloss might be an attempt at including them in the community at a later stage. Since the Gibeonites, "hewers of wood and drawers of water", were probably included in the community that renewed the covenant in Deut 29:10, the connection between the Gibeonites and the *netinim* might have also served the purpose of promoting the latter by analogy as members of the post-exilic community as well.

43 Levine 1963, 209–10.

44 But see above, fn42 about the possibility that Neh 10:29–30a might be a gloss.

45 *Contra* Williamson 1985, 97; Blenkinsopp 1988, 91. The term *pāləḥê* in Official Aramaic seems to simply designate those who 'serve' a god without further nuances as, e.g., in KAI 269, 4. See Fried 2017, 327; cf. Weinberg 1992, 87–8.

singers are explicitly excluded from it. Another argument against their serf condition is given in the already seen Neh 11:3, where they appear to dwell each in his own property (*ʾăḥūzzāh*) in the cities of Yehud. If the *ʿabdê Šəlōmōh* to whom the sons of Solomon's servants reach back are indeed to be thought of as royal merchants, it would be tempting to see the latter as the merchants (*hārōkəlîm*) who shared their residence with the *netinim* on the Ophel during the restoration of the Jerusalem walls (Neh 3:31). It is not unrealistic to think of a class of traders as belonging to the ranks of the temple personnel, if the 'temple' comprised not only strictly speaking the facilities where cultic offices took place, but also the material and economic infrastructures that supported such activities.[46] In Neo-Babylonian temples, *tamkāru* merchants were an integral part of the economic organization and played an important role as brokers, buying foodstuffs and other primary goods produced in the temple properties, and supplying luxury goods in turn.[47]

A serf status of the *netinim* is disputable on similar grounds. On the one hand, the names of the *netinim* listed among the first returnees in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 feature an unusual number of hypocoristics and informal nicknames based on physical features, e.g., Gaḥar 'Freckles' (Ezra 2:47/Neh 7:49),[48] or on professions or skills, e.g., Ḥarsha 'Smithy' (Ezra 2:52/Neh 7:54).[49] Such nicknames were typically given to slaves, servants and unfree workers.[50] On the other hand, the *netinim* do take part in the *ʾămānâ* in Neh 10:29–30a, like the sons of Solomon's servants they are included as members of the *qāhāl* (Ezra 2:64 / Neh 7:66), and they dwell in the cities of Yehud in their own properties (Neh 11:3). Moreover, according to Ezra 7:24, they received together with the rest of the temple staff some tax exemptions as per Artaxerxes' decree:

> [Regarding] all the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, *netinim*, and workers of this house of god, neither rent [*mindâ*], tribute [*bəlô*], nor corvée [*halāk*] is authorized to impose upon them.

While the exact scope and nature of these exemptions remain debated matters,[51] this passage makes clear at least that the *netinim* were subject to the same financial conditions as

46 See Stevens 2006, 82–120, esp. 117–20 on trade; Niesiołowski-Spanò, 2025.

47 Joannès 1999, 177–8; Jursa 2010, 580–1; Alstola 2017, 28. Cf. Moser 2025: 487–8.

48 Zadok 1980, 112; Fried 2017, 123.

49 Eskenazi 2023, 174. Cf. Zadok 1980, 114 who translates 'deaf' based on the Aramaic word.

50 Zadok 1980; Williamson 1985, 36; Blenkinsopp 1988, 90–1; Fried 2017, 120; Eskenazi 2023, 174.

51 Aramaic *mindâ*, *bəlô*, and *halāk* are Akkadian loanwords. *Halāk* (Akk. *ilku*) designated service obligations, mostly corvée labor, which temple officials were providing regularly to the crown all over the Achaemenid empire; see Fried 2004, 20–4; 63–5; 108–19; 2017, 304. There is no consensus on the precise meaning of the other two terms, *mindâ* (Akk. *mandattu*) and *bəlô* (Akk. *biltu*). For discussion providing former literature see Fried 2017, 214–5; Silverman 2021, 356–8; Eskenazi 2023, 230–1.

the other groups of temple staff vis-à-vis the Persian authority.[52] Moreover, chattel slaves were likely not expected to render corvée labor in their own rights.[53]

As for the origins of the *netinim* and the sons of Solomon's servants, the picture is a little clearer. Out of the forty-five known names of the two groups combined, most are West-Semitic non-Hebrew names, a few others are foreign names of different origins (Arabian, Aramaic, Egyptian), and only nine are Hebrew.[54] While it is true that an individual foreign name does not automatically equal a foreign origin, such a high incidence of non-Hebrew names when compared with the other name lists of returnees leaves little doubt that these two groups were not natives to Yehud. However, this should not automatically imply that they were descendants from prisoners of war captured from neighboring regions in pre-exilic times, as some interpreters would have.[55] A closer look at these two name lists reveals that there are many parallels or comparable personal names in documents from two cuneiform archives, the so-called 'Fortification archive' in Persepolis and, notably, the Yāḫūdu archive.[56] Given this picture, it seems likelier that the bulks of those groups were brought together during or after the exile, not before, and this would further endorse the view of a (post-)exilic origin of *netinim* and sons of Solomon's servants.

If the long-held parallel between *netinim* and Babylonian *širku*s (temple oblates) in the 1st mill. BCE holds any plausibility,[57] it would not be about the latter's condition of servitude, which is disputable,[58] but rather about the diverse nature of their contributions as people

52 Fried 2017, 326–7 observes that the Persian king could not have known the names of the different groups of temple-staff in the Jerusalem temple, and thus the list in Ezra 7:24 was not originally included in Artaxerxes' decree. This is certainly true, but it does not necessarily mean, in our case, that the inclusion of the *netinim* cannot be trusted as historical. After all, the sources are consistent in presenting the *netinim* as providing corvée work (*halāk*) in the construction of the walls of Jerusalem before the decree; see Fried 2018. Cf. Bedford 2015, 345.

53 Cf. Kleber 2011, 107.

54 The most thorough onomastic analyses of these lists can be found in Zadok 1980, 110–6 and Bortz 2018, 290–7.

55 If Meunim and Nephishim (Ezra 2:50/Neh 7:52) are to be considered gentilics rather than personal names, then they might refer to members of Arabian tribes taken as prisoners of war during monarchic times according to 1Chr 5:19; 2Chr 26:7. See Zadok 1980, 116; Williamson 1985, 36; Blenkinsopp 1988, 90; Eskenazi 2023, 174; cf. Knoppers 2004a, 369. In any case, however, there is no way to prove the historicity of those narratives.

56 See the detailed survey in Bortz 2018, 290–7.

57 Starting from Dougherty's monograph dedicated to *širkūtu* (Dougherty 1923), most scholarly contributions on the *netinim* included at least a mention in passing to Babylonian *širku*s; see most recently Kellenberger 2024; Moser 2025. The latter offers the strongest argument for the influence of the *širkūtu* institution on the formalization of the *netinim* as a distinct class of temple personnel. It is important, however, to note the difference between Moser's approach and our own. He understands the *netinim* as part of an idealized temple complex envisioned by postexilic biblical authors in the context of an aspirational and utopian reconfiguration of the Judahite cult. In contrast, the present study seeks to situate the *netinim* and comparable institutions within the historical realities of Persian-period Yehud.

58 Far from designating the condition of chattel slaves owned by the temples, the concept of *širkūtu* encompassed a wide range of different socio-economic situations. Babylonian sources attest to a great

related to the temple. The *netinim* would be a class of miscellaneous professionals providing a wide range of activities and services that were necessary to the maintenance of the temple endeavor and that were not performed by the other groups of temple staff.[59] This picture makes the best sense of the numbers and the internal subdivision of the *netinim* and sons of Solomon's servants. In fact, it is true that their total number in the lists (392) is far higher than that of other temple-staff, but the numbers of their collectives are also much higher (45 in Ezra 2; 42 in Neh 7), resulting in a much lower ratio of individuals per collective.[60] This makes a subdivision based on descendance or clan relations far less likely.[61] Rather, the lists of *netinim* and sons of Solomon's servants might enumerate groups of independent contractors affiliated with the temple and sorted by the nature of their activity.[62] This explains the presence in the lists of *netinim* of some (nick)names indicating professions – smiths, stonecutters, woodcutters, craftsmen, hunters[63] – and the possibility that only selected *netinim*, likely construction workers, were living in a shared housing facility on the Ophel while working on the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem under the supervision of Ziha and Gishpa (Neh 11:21), i.e., their taskmasters or foremen. The sons of Solomons servants represented still other professional categories beyond the *netinim*, maybe engaged in trading and brokering the import-export of goods to and from the temple endeavor.

This scenario is not at odds with but rather complemented by Fried's hypothesis of these lists as a census of *ḫadru* units similar to those known from Babylonia in the Persian period, i.e., estates tied to groups of residents organized by ethnicity, kinship, or occupa-

diversity of activities carried out by *širku*s, at different levels of the social hierarchy and of the economic spectrum. Their obligations towards the temple were not constructed as coertions or forced labor followed by a remuneration, but as tax obligations instead. See Ragen 2006; Kleber 2011; 2018; 444–46; Wunsch and Magdalene 2014; Dromard 2017. Most recent discussions can be found in Bartash 2025: 55–58 and Wunsch 2025. The latter draws attention on the oversimplification brought about by the use of the new vulgata terminology of 'semi-free' applied to *širkus*. In contrast, she highlights a more nuanced picture, where social standing is defined not only through and by the legal status of an individual (slave/'semi-free'/free), but also through his relationship with the head of the household – be it a private or a temple household, where the deity has the role of the head of household (195–96).

59 The suggestion put forward by some interpreters (Gray 1962, 116; cf. 1965, 213; Levine 1963, 211–2; Blenkinsopp 1988, 90 *contra* Weinberg 1992, 79) that the *netinim* had a sort of forerunner in the *ytnm* mentioned in a register (*spr*) of wine rations from Ugarit (KTU^3 4:93 I 1) is probably misguided. Despite many philological difficulties, the text is clearly not related in any way to temple environments. The term *ytnm* seems indeed to refer to a group of professionals, but these were more likely 'overseers' (<*yṯ*), with no relation to the root **ytn*, 'to give'. See Dietrich and Loretz 1977, 338–9. Cf. Zamora 2000, 366; DULAT^3, 977; Fried 2017, 119. In any case, a parallel between two historical realities almost a millenium apart from each other, based exclusively on linguistic grounds and without the support of any other circumstancial evidence cannot be regarded as more than an exercise in imagination.

60 The ratio for the *netinim* is 8,7 or 9,3 people per collective (in Ezra 2 and Neh 7 respectively). The next lowest ratio is that of the gatekeepers, ca. 23 per collective.

61 Weinberg 1992, 89–90.

62 Cf. the reconstruction in Levine 1963, who argued that the *netinim* as a unit formed a cultic guild. Cf. Aharoni 1981, 121.

63 Zadok 1980, 110–6; Fried 2017, 120–8; Bortz 2018, 290–7; Eskenazi 2023, 171–6.

tion for purposes related to the collection of taxes and labor force.[64] Significantly for the case in question, Kleber argues that the organization of *ḫadru*s according to profession rather than agnation reflected new measures introduced with a tax reformation in the Achaemenid administration after the Babylonian inserructions against Xerxes and the turmoils of 484.[65] If the lists in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 were indeed *ḫadru* lists, it would not have been too difficult for a later redactor to standardize them and make them look like a demographic register of returnees.

This analysis revealed a different angle on the *netinim* and the sons of Solomon's servants, challenging the prevalent scholarly view. They were not 'given' to the temple and did not live in Jerusalem to administer menial tasks in support of the cultic offices. They were not workers *for* the temple, but in their capacity as independent contractors they lived in their own cities in Yehud, and they were rather professionals working *with* the temple as contributors, or providers of all those logistical and economic activities that ensured the smooth operation of the temple economy and its requirements for offerings, staples, materials, and provisions. This group of foreign professionals soon came to be recognized not only as part of the community in Yehud, but also, because of their affiliation to the temple, as a privileged segment of the population, and were granted the same perks as other categories such as priests, Levites, singers, and gatekeepers. The order in which these categories appear in the lists, rather than implying a hierarchy based on the criterion of decreasing cultic importance, or 'sanctity', or 'nobility',[66] might in fact indicate different degrees of economic and organizational autonomy from an ideal center (the temple) in concentric circles, with the priests in the closest sector, and the *netinim* and the sons of Solomon's servants in the furthest.

Temple Singers (משררים)

The term משררים (*məšōrərîm*, 'Singers') derives from the word *šyr* 'song'.[67] It is therefore the name of a group built denominatively from what the members of this group were supposed to be concerned with. This designation remains in some relation to another term used to describe singers: *šārîm* (e.g. 1 Kgs 10:12; Ps 87:7).[68] The term appears in the Hebrew Bible in a dozen places, but only in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles, making it difficult to decide from the term itself whether it is a neologism coined in the Persian period – therefore suggesting that the institution of such singers only originated at that time – or whether it is a continuation of an institution dating back to the time

64 Fried 2017, 138–41. On *ḫadru*s see further Stolper 1985, 70–103; van Driel 2002, 230–45; 308–10. Settlement patterns in southern Yehud in the late Persian period might reflect a territorial organization compatible with a *ḫadru*-based system, but the archeological data are far from being clear; see Silverman 2021, 363; Eskenazi 2023, 189 for discussion and references.

65 Kleber 2021, 72–3. On the Babylonian revolts against Xerxes in 484 see Waerzeggeres 2003/04.

66 E.g., Schaper 2000, 281–2; cf. Weinberg 1992, 86.

67 DCH 8, 337–8.

68 Cf. Fried 2017, 114.

of the monarchy. Along these lines, it might also be speculated that the use of the term *məšōrərîm* might have been used as a new designation for a certain category of people, rather than a simply denoting the activity that those people performed. So every *məšōrêr* was also one of the *šārîm*, but not every *šārîm* was one of the *məšōrərîm*. In the LXX, the Hebrew term is rendered ᾄδοντες, a pres. prtl. from ᾄδειν – "to sing", which leaves no room for interpretation, as in the case of the Latin term *cantores*.

In this context, it is worth asking whether the temple singers were professionals, i.e., if they were engaged exclusively with this activity and therefore received a wage from the temple, or if they only sang 'after-hours'. Another point in question would be if the singers performed their role voluntarily, or they were rather bound to the temple by some formalized relationship. They could have been either a hired choir, which was paid for its services, or representatives of a population not entirely free who had as part of their duties the 'artistic' service of the temple. The answer to such questions may help understand the structure and economic nature of the temple in Jerusalem. If singers were indeed professional cantors engaged exclusively in their service to the temple, then the latter as an institution must have had significant resources to sustain, among other expenses, a body of singers on a permanent basis. It is possible, however, that the singers were not professionals at all, but served in the temple on top of other activities. This would then be some sort of contribution in kind to the cultic institution by those on whom such a contribution was imposed.

In some biblical passages this group is treated as overlapping with that of the Levites, as evidenced, for example, by 2Chr 5:12 which mentions 'all the Levitical singers' [*haləwiyyim hamšōrărîm*]. It may therefore be considered that, despite the presence of this name in Ezra 2 as a separate group, it is a differentiation by virtue of the various tasks associated with the singing in the temple, and not indeed a separate category. Ezra 2:70 refers to the division of the settlers into two groups: those who settled in Jerusalem - the priests, Levites 'and some of the people' and those who settled in 'in their towns', among whom were also the singers:

> So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the *netinim*, and all Israel settled in their towns. (cf. Neh 7:72)

If the singers were to perform their function continuously and professionally in the temple, their distribution in the cities would have been a hindrance to their service. This is a reason to see in this group a category of people who settled in the province of Yehud, and whose designation did not denote a full-time profession, but the nature of the duty they were obliged to provide to the temple. Just like the gatekeepers, the singers were paid with funds raised by the temple:

> For in the days of David and Asaph long ago there was a leader of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers. (Neh 12:46–47).

Interestingly, the book of Nehemiah gives details of the settlement of this group:

> The companies of the singers gathered together from the circuit around Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites, also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. (Neh 12:28–29)

At the same time, one can see what could and probably did happen when the temple did not fulfil its obligations to, among others, the singers:

> I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers who had conducted the service had gone back to their fields. (Neh 13:10)

The reference in Neh 12:46 to the times of David and Asaph – which does not necessarily refer to the real past, but only signals a reference to some past, perhaps simply suggesting a time before the Babylonian exile – might be a signal that the author wanted to suggest that the group of singers and gatekeepers had a long tradition. Should this kind of declaration not be taken as evidence of innovation, accompanied by the construction of an argument about the 'antiquity' of the institution, as it was probably the case with the *netinim*?[69] In this point the MT contains a variant about the number of the leader(s), depending on the reading *rōʾš* (singular), or *rŏʾšê* (plural).[70] The LXX leans towards the singular (πρῶτος), which may suggest that this 'leader of the singers' (*rōʾš haməšōrərîm*) may have been not much of a conductor, but also the person responsible for distributing the payments to the members of this group. However, the question about the competence of this leader of the singers cannot be answered with certainty and must be regarded just as a working hypothesis.

These scant sources suggest that the temple singers were a group characterized only by virtue of the activities they performed in the temple. They were therefore not a separate professional group. They lived mainly outside Jerusalem and received payments for their services in the temple. Does it follow that they were a group of cantors whose high artistry required remuneration? If they were engaged in other professions this would be unlikely. Perhaps then it is possible that the 'portions' due to the singers for their work in the temple were not proper wages, bur rather reimbursements for their lost days of work in 'their fields'.

Final Remarks

It is not clear whether the four categories discussed above, somehow linked to the functioning of the temple in Jerusalem, form a coherent reality, since we do not know whether

69 Cf. Niesiołowski-Spanò 2021.

70 Singular *ketiv* (ראש), plural qere (רָאשֵׁי); see BHQ.

they actually existed simultaneously. However, we do have a clear indication of their common placement in the Ezra-Nehemiah corpus. Let us therefore assume that either they functioned side by side in the imagination of the authors of these texts, or indeed their descriptions are a reflection of the reality described by these biblical authors. For the sake of conclusion, let us make the optimistic assumption that such groups may have existed in the Persian period, whether we date them as usual to the middle of the 5th c. BCE or to the time of Artaxerxes II (404–358).[71]

There is a clear distinction between these groups and the rest of the population of Yehud, although not in a homogeneous way. The gatekeepers appear to be high-ranking officials involved in the economic activity of the temple. The *netinim* seem to be members of the civic community enjoying special rights in spite of (or in connection with) their foreign origins. The sons of Solomon's servants are the most 'artificial' group, for already in their name they contain a reference to a meta-text, or tradition, the form and extent of which at the time of Ezra's writing we cannot be certain of. Finally, the temple singers do not appear to us – as they often do in scholarly literature – as low-ranking choristers or cantors, but rather individuals obliged to render services to the temple and therefore somehow distinguished from the rest of the people in Yehud.

It is also not insignificant to link the reality we are reconstructing here to the hypothesis - proposed by one of us - that the Jerusalem temple in the Persian period owned significant landholdings.[72] Therefore, in this respect it was similar to contemporary temples in Mesopotamia, which were important centres of local and regional economic life in addition to their cultic activity.[73] Accepting this hypothesis, we may venture to suggest that when the biblical authors speak of groups performing certain duties for the temple they may mean performing them locally, i.e., in temple estates situated outside Jerusalem. This would be possible especially in the case of the gatekeepers, if we accept their activity in the taxation sphere, and the *netinim* and sons of Solomon's servants, whose scope of activity we are not sure about.

On the other hand, if we think – especially in the case of the singers – that these services were indeed performed in the main sanctuary, some conclusions can be put forward. First, if the population residing outside Jerusalem was obliged to provide services to the central sanctuary it must be assumed that this work was strictly defined and these services recorded. We would therefore have to assume the existence of a detailed bookkeeping of the work provided to the temple. Second, the organization of such a system of services would have to be based on a precisely defined calendar, applicable to all, in which certain activities and the fulfilment of obligations could be foreseen and planned in advance. Guillaume argued that the creation of the 364-days Sabbatical calendar should not be considered a product of Qumranic sectarianism, but that it was rather introduced in Yehud in the years immediately

71 Fogielman 2024.

72 Niesiołowski-Spanò 2025.

73 *Contra* Bedford 2007, who does not see Babylonian temples as pertinent parallels "given the difference in scale, range of activities, control of land, modes of extracting income, economic importance, and close interaction with the crown" (*20); cf. Lipschits 2024.

following the shift from the Babylonian to the Persian authority.[74] If we are to trust this reconstruction, then the system we tried to describe in these pages would be contemporary with, or later than, the creation of this calendar in use in Yehud.

Admittedly, this historical reconstruction placed in Persian period Yehud encounters another difficulty. As Fried argues convincingly,[75] in Persian times power was firmly in the hands of the Persian governor, and the potential role of the temple was subordinate to his authority. Then how do we place the groups obliged to provide services to the temple when we should rather expect services to the Persian crown? An organization of the territory based on *ḥadru* units would be compatible with the picture of the Jerusalem temple as an extension of the Persian state,[76] i. e., not only a centre for cultic services and ceremonies, but also and maybe primarily an organizational infrastructure for taxation and collection of labor, mediating between the population of peasants in the province of Yehud and the imperial authority.

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74 Guillame 2005.

75 Fried 2020; cf. Bedford 2015; Lipschits 2024.

76 Cf. Kleber 2011, 107.

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Abbreviations

ABD =	Freedman, David N. (ed.). 1992. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 Vols. New York: Doubleday.
Ant. Jud. =	Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* (*Antiquities of the Jews*).
BHQ =	Biblia Hebraica Quinta.
BHS =	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.
b.Hor =	*bavli Horayot*
b.Makk. =	*bavli Makkot*
b.Sof. =	*bavli Soferim*
b.Yeb. =	*bavli Yevamot*
DCH =	Clines, David J.A. (ed.). 1993–2011. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. 8 Vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press / Sheffield Phoenix Press.
DNWSI =	Hoftijzer, Jacob and Karel Jongeling. 1995. *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*. 2 Vols. Leiden / New York / Köln: Brill.
DULAT^3 =	del Olmo Lete, Gregorio and Joaquín Sanmartín (eds). 2015. *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*. Third Revised Edition. HdO 112. Translated by Wilfred G.E. Watson. Leiden / Boston: Brill.
EBR =	Breed, Brennan, Constance M. Furey, Peter Gemeinhardt, Joel LeMon, Thomas Römer, Jens Schröter, Barry D. Walfish, and Eric Ziolkowski (eds). *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, 2009–. Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter.
GELS =	Muraoka, Takamitsu. 2009. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*. Louvain/Paris/Walpole (MA): Peeters.
GKC2 =	Gesenius, Wilhelm, Emil Kautzsch, and Arthur E. Cowley A.E. 1956. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Second English Edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
HCIBP =	Aḥituv, Shmuel. 2008. *Echoes from the Past. Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period*. Jerusalem: Carta 2008.
JM =	Joüon, Paul and Takamitsu Muraoka. 2011. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew. Third Reprint of the Second Edition, with Corrections*. Studia Biblica 27. Roma: Gregorian University Press.
KAI =	Donner, Herbert and Wolfgang Röllig. 2002. *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. Band I. 5., erweiterte und überarbeitete Auflage. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
KTU^3 =	Dietrich Manfried, Oswald Loretz and Joaquín Sanmartín (eds). 2013. *Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani und anderen Orten*. Dritte, erweiterte Auflage. AOAT 360/1. Münster, Ugarit-Verlag.
LSJ =	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry S. Jones and Roderick McKenzie. 1996. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Ninth Editon, with a Revised Supplement. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
MT =	Masoretic Text.
TDOT =	Botterweck, G. Johannes and Helmer Ringgren (eds). 1977–2012. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. 15 Vols. Grand Rapids (MI): Eerdmans.

Child Priests in Roman Italy[1]

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Introduction

The inclusive nature of Roman religious practices made it possible for every individual to have religious roles, including children. Children could even hold religious offices, such as priesthoods. The most notable other religious roles for children were the choirs and processions of children in the Republican-era rites of crisis and the *ludi saeculares* festivals, among other instances. Children also acted as ritual assistants and had specific roles in certain festivals. Despite the plethora of other religious roles, this paper focuses mainly on child priests. What cults had children as their priests and why? What kind of responsibilities could these offices entail?

In this paper, I concentrate on the Italian peninsula from the late Republican period to the Flavian era. This framework contains the most typical aspects of Roman religious practices. It is not easy to determine who was a priest in antiquity; thus, in this paper, I will consider the cases where the children are described as priests (*sacerdos*) or using other terms for religious offices akin to those used for adults in similar roles. A priest can be defined as a cult official with religious responsibilities and duties. Priesthood is also a more permanent role or office than the occasional participation in a choir or other religious tasks.

As childhood is temporary, determining who is a child, and when they ceased to be one, is critical for this research. In this paper, I will consider all cases where one can presume a youth had not yet gone through the rites of passage that changed one's status to that of an adult, at least in a religious sense. For boys, these rites were the *toga virilis* and *depositio barbae* ceremonies. For girls, it was a similar ritual that usually happened in connection with the marriage rituals. There was no set age for these rituals, but they usually occurred roughly between the ages of 13 and 18.[2] The source material contains children

1 I am most grateful to Katariina Mustakallio, Outi Sihvonen, and Ville Vuolanto for commenting on the draft of this paper. Thank you also to Patrick Lambdin for proofreading the text. All remaining mistakes are my own.

2 In my upcoming doctoral thesis, I propose that these rituals ended childhood in a religious sense. Other aspects of life worked as the rites of passage for social and political adulthood. More on the

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from a wide age range, but, since their status as a child is the defining factor, age differences will not be considered here. They represented the religious aspects connected to children and were not yet fully fledged and capable members of the society.

All possible source types which might shed light on the little-known world of child priests in Roman Italy are considered here. This paper relies heavily upon an epigraphic corpus I have collected through research for this paper. In addition to epigraphy, Roman literature offers some examples regarding the young age of priests. Iconographic sources and numismatic evidence are also considered. Nevertheless, they are not at the core of this paper. It is not usually possible to determine whether the depicted ritual actor in iconography or coinage actually held any religious office at all, let alone their status as either child or adult. This paper introduces new evidence, which has not yet been used to discuss child priests. More often, individual priesthoods and cases have been studied separately, leading to the conclusion that child priests were primarily incidental curiosities with no actual duties.

Child priests in Rome have not been studied meticulously before this. Some of the cases studied here are considered in previous research, which concentrates on other aspects. The most relevant study on the subject is Christian Laes' article "Children and Office Holding in Roman Antiquity" (2004), which sums up many cases of children holding political and religious offices. Laes mainly focuses on political offices and considers the religious offices from a political perspective. He also does not consider most of the source material analyzed in this paper. Other religious roles of children in Roman antiquity have been considered in multiple articles, but priesthoods have been mostly left on the sidelines in these studies apart from the child Vestal Virgins who are often considered briefly.[3] Roman childhood studies have gained momentum lately, but child priests have not received any further scrutiny. It is high time to bring light to the religious offices children held and bring forth new information on children's societal status.

The priestly roles of children varied greatly as some priesthoods specifically required children, and others perhaps happened to have children in the offices only occasionally. Child priests generally appear in five contexts: 1. the Vestal Virgins, 2. the *Salii* priests, 3. the priests of Vulcan in Ostia, 4. individual cases of child priests, and finally, 5. the child priests from the imperial family. The first two categories required that new priests were children when they joined the priesthood. The third category is not as well-known but probably had similar requirements for joining the priesthood. The fourth category consists of individual cases not from widely known priesthoods. Thus, the status of the child priests remains unknown. Lastly, the category of imperial children differs from the other cases because children holding offices was likely merely a dynastic measure to bring prestige and promote continuity.

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rituals: Dolansky 2008; Harlow & Laurence 2010; Hersch 2010; Caldwell 2015; Degelmann 2018; Degelmann 2021.

3 Articles on the religious roles of children in Rome: Mantle 2002; Prescendi 2010; Vuolanto 2010; McWilliam 2013; Mackey 2017; McWilliam 2021. In Greek contexts, child priests have gotten a bit more attention. See, e.g. Dillon 2021, 334–335; Bobou 2021, 364–365.

1 The Vestal Virgins

The Vestals were one of the oldest priesthoods in Rome, deriving from mythological origins predating the city. The Vestals' main task was to take care of the sacred hearth of the goddess Vesta, as well as look after the sacred objects in their sanctuary. The hearth represented all the hearths of Rome, symbolizing the well-being and integrity of the city as well. Originally, there were two Vestal Virgins, then four, but even in the early Republican period, the number had already increased to six priestesses. The Vestals were also active participants in the city and its events, which brought them political influence in addition to their more obvious religious power.[4]

The Vestal Virgins had to be selected for their offices as children. Aulus Gellius describes the requirements for entering the Vestals in his *Noctes Atticae*. Gellius states that according to Labeo Antistius, a girl should be elected as a Vestal by the Pontifex when she was between 6 and 10 years old. After this, Gellius continues to describe the requirements of a suitable Vestal. She must be of the status of *patrima et matrima* (meaning having both of her parents alive), and she must be free of any impairments; that is, she must be physically perfect. The list continues with more specific requirements for the status of the girl's parents.[5] Similar requirements of the status of *patrimus et matrimus* and physical perfection are described with other children in religious roles.[6]

According to regulation, the Vestals continued in their priestly position for at least 30 years, but could continue in the position even longer, if they so desired. During this time, they had to remain virgins, live in the Vestal compound, and act accordingly.[7] As far as we know, a new Vestal was chosen when there was a vacancy for one. If several vacancies occurred at similar times, there could be multiple child Vestals at once. In the early 3rd Century, four children were serving as Vestal Virgins simultaneously — meaning a majority of the priesthood were children at the time.[8]

Despite this, there is little evidence of the actual child Vestals. Researchers have suggested that they merely acted as acolytes in the priesthood and were of lower status in its hierarchy.[9] Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch have inspired this idea as they both claim that the Vestal Virgins spent the first ten years of their office learning their duties, the next ten performing them, and the last ten teaching them to the other priestesses.[10]

4 For the number of Vestals, see e.g. Staples 1998, 129–132; Mustakallio 2007, 186; Sihvonen 2020, 100. For their societal status, see e.g. Staples 1998, 141–145; Takács 2008, 81–86. For more studies on the Vestals see: Mustakallio 1997; Staples 1998; Parker 2004; Wildfang 2006; Mustakallio 2007; Takács 2008; Sihvonen 2020.

5 *Gellius NA* 1, 12.

6 These requirements for children participating in religious roles are analyzed more thoroughly in my upcoming doctoral thesis. More on *patrimi et matrimi* below.

7 Mustakallio 1997, 76–80; Mustakallio 2007, 197–199.

8 Sihvonen 2020, 102–103.

9 Mustakallio 2007, 188–190; Sihvonen 2020, 91–100.

10 Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2, 67. Plut. *Numa* 10.

Despite the Vestal children still learning their duties, the only evidence of child Vestals represents them participating in a ritual. Perhaps they were meant to learn the "trade" by performing the duties from the start. A certain coin type depicts adult and child Vestals conducting a ritual by an altar by themselves or together with a priest.[11] In the case of this coin motif, it is easy to recognize the smaller figures as freeborn girls, specifically Vestals, as they wear similar outfits and hairstyles to the larger figures. The same coin type has been minted a few separate times from the Severan dynasty forward, at least with Caracalla (214 CE), Julia Domna (in 211–217 CE), and Postumus (in 263 CE) minted on the obverse. A similar coin type is also known from a period when all the Vestals were depicted as adults.[12] This could imply that the Vestals were depicted to represent the current situation accurately in the coin type, and the height differences did not just represent their hierarchal status.[13] There is no evidence on the specific ritual that the coins depict, but it at least seemed to require that all the Vestals were present despite their age or experience.

In addition to the coin type, the Vestal children are perhaps represented in the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, where a procession of the Vestals is depicted inside the building. None of the figures in the relief look particularly childlike, but they are portrayed in different heights. This could represent their varying ages. The visual evidence would suggest that the child Vestals were active priestesses in their own right and not just mere acolytes as has been suggested.

Outi Sihvonen suggests that the Vestals had an inner hierarchy and different duties depending on their age group and status in the priesthood. Their age and time in the priesthood seemed to determine their status in the inner hierarchy.[14] Sihvonen has noticed that in the visual sources, the young priestesses also wore the vestments that marked them ready to perform sacrifices.[15] The possible hierarchy does not bar child Vestals from having ritual duties of their own. Rather, their appearance would suggest that they were religious agents.

The child Vestals were a part of the priesthood, and thus, priestesses in their own right. They participated in rituals with the other priestesses. They might still have been learning their duties, but they learned by participating in the rituals with the others. Especially in periods when there were many child Vestals simultaneously, even the younger ones had to take on more responsibilities. Their role and presence in the priesthood were as important as the other Vestals despite their young age.

11 *RIC IV Caracalla* 249, 392b, 594B, 607; *RIC* V *Postumus* 9.
12 For example: *RIC IV Septimius Severus* 586.
13 Sihvonen also believes that the Vestals were depicted to represent the current age division. Sihvonen 2020, 87 note 295, 100 note 346.
14 Sihvonen 2020, 100–104.
15 Sihvonen 2020, 103 note 359.

2 The *Salii* Priests

The *Salii* priesthood was one of the oldest colleges in Rome. Yet it has not aroused the interests of many ancient authors whose texts have survived to this day. As a result, many of the customs remain unknown. The priesthood has not been researched much recently, apart from a handful of articles that handle only some specific aspects.[16] Originally, the *Salii* consisted of 12 young elite priests, and according to some ancient authors, the priesthood got its name from their rituals where they danced jumping (*salitare*) in a warlike manner.[17] Their most important rituals were indeed the ritual dances accompanied by the singing of the *carmen Saliare* while moving around the city in March when the war period began and in October when it ended.[18]

The priesthood was at some point (possibly during the reign of Augustus) divided into two different branches in Rome: The *Salii Palatini* and the *Salii Collini* (also known as the *Agonenses* or *Agonales*).[19] The branches were based in different parts of the city and honored different gods. The *Palatini* had their *sacrarium Martis* on the Palatine Hill where they honored Mars. Alternatively, the *Collini* had their religious center with all likelihood on the Quirinalis as they honored the god Quirinus in their rites.[20] In addition to these two Roman branches, there existed local *Salii* priesthoods in other towns.[21]

The *Salii* had to have both of their parents alive (ἀμφιθαλεῖς) when they took office, as Dionysius of Halicarnassus explains in his *Roman Antiquities*. He also compares the *Salii* with the Greek *kouretes* because of their similarly young age.[22] Although we have no information about any age limits for joining the *Salii*, it is clear that the priests had to take the office quite young. The *patrimi et matrimi* (or ἀμφιθαλεῖς) requirement in itself sets the age usually quite low because of Roman demographic realities.[23] It was also a prerequisite for joining the Vestals, as is seen above. The priesthood of *Salii* was often one of the first offices an elite boy received, and usually, they left the priesthood when they were granted a better office.[24] Those who died young had often only held a *Salius* priesthood and perhaps some other office before their passing.[25] To our knowledge, there was no age limit to how long one could stay in the *Salii*, so the priesthood probably had some older priests as well.

16 The most comprehensive study on the *Salii* still remains *Les prêtres danseurs de Rome: etude sur la corporation sacerdotale des Saliens* by R. Cirilli. Cirilli 1913. For more recent articles see e.g. Letta 2000; Glinister 2011; Guittard 2013; Granino Cecere 2014; Sarullo 2014; Patzelt 2022.

17 Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom*. 2, 70, 1–5; 2, 71, 4; Plut. *Vit. Num.* 13, 3–5; Varro *Ling.* 5, 85.

18 Guittard 2013, 177–178.

19 Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom*. 2, 70, 1. Rüpke et al. 2008, 8; Sarullo 2014, 6–7.

20 Cirilli 1913, 73–74; Guittard 2013, 177–181.

21 It is certain that at least Tusculum, Lanuvium, Alba, Anagnia, Aricia, and Tibur had their own *Salii*. Glinister 2011, 111–112.

22 Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom*. 2, 71, 4; 2, 70, 3–4.

23 Rawson 2003, 338; Wildfang 2006, 44.

24 The *Fasti* lists many occasions when someone left the priesthood for another religious office. E.g., *CIL* XV 7523; *CIL* VI 1982. See also Glinister 2011, 120. Even Rüpke et al. list the *Salii* priesthood as one of the first religious roles in their small religious bibliographies in the *Fasti Sacerdotum*. Rüpke et al. 2008.

25 For example: *CIL* VI 1439; *CIL* IX 4855.

The epigraphic *Fasti* listings of different *Salii* priesthoods (especially the *Palatini*) have partly survived. The *Fasti Salii Palatini,* for example, contains every priest who entered or left the priesthood during a certain year. With some of them known from other contexts, it has been possible to calculate their age when they entered or left the *Salii*. The cases considered here are the youngest known individual *Salii* priests whose ages it has been possible to calculate and who, with all likelihood, began in the office before receiving the *toga virilis* and reaching adulthood in any sense. Probably the most famous young *Salius* is Marcus Aurelius, who got the office at the age of eight. The exact career of Marcus Aurelius is well known because of the *Historia Augusta*. Thus, we know that he held many different offices in the priesthood: the "dancer" (*praesul*), the "seer" (*vates*), and the "magistrate" (*magister*).[26] It was probably impossible to hold different offices simultaneously in the same priesthood, so we have to assume that these presented different stages of his career in the priesthood. Which office he received when he first began in the priesthood is impossible to tell. There were also other young *Salii*, who came from the highest echelons of the society. Lucius Junius Silanus (a possible heir to Claudius) became a *Salius* at 12 in 43 CE.[27] Decimus Caelius Calvinus Balbinus (later an emperor for a short while in 238 CE) had to have started in the *Salii* between the ages of 13 to 20 (between the years 191–198 CE).

Often, it is only possible to determine a *terminus ante quem* for entering the *Salii*, because a child lost a parent and could not have entered the priesthood after that point according to the *patrimi et matrimi* requirement. This is the case with C. Julius Caesar, for instance. Caesar is known to have been part of the priesthood because he minted a coin in 48–47 BCE depicting the special *ancile* shield that the *Salii* used.[28] Because Caesar's father died in 85 BCE when he was fifteen years old, he had to have joined the priesthood before this.[29] The same logic applies to many known *Salii*. Similarly, a Vettius Crispinus lost his father at the latest in 95 CE when he was fifteen. He is known to have been part of the *Salii* because Statius alludes to his priestly role in his praise of him in his *Silvae*.[30] Both Caesar and Crispinus could have been very young when they were taken into the *Salii*. Still, it had happened before they were fifteen at the latest.

Another kind of *terminus ante quem* is when a *Salii* got another office (and his previous office is mentioned), left the priesthood, or passed away. P. Aelius Tiro had joined a branch of the *Salii* (*salius Arcis Albanus*) before he was fourteen because, at that point, Commodus appointed him as a *Praefectura equitum Brauconum* as is mentioned in an honorary inscription set for him.[31] There is no mention of whether he left the priesthood

26 *HA Aur.* 4, 3–4.
27 *CIL* VI 37162; *FS* 2130; *PIR*² J 829.
28 *RRC* 452/3.
29 Rüpke 2018, 123–124, 404 note 46; *FS* 2003.
30 Stat. *Silv.* 5, 2, 130–1; *FS* 3471.
31 *CIL* XIV 2947; *FS* 486.

at this point. There are also many instances where we know of quite young *Salii*, some of whom died as youths. We cannot be sure when they actually got these positions.[32]

In addition to the aforementioned cases, Karlheinz Dietz lists other young *Salii*. Many of the cases in his list are problematic, because he presents definite ages for some of the young priests without actual evidence of their birth years.[33] All of the cases mentioned by Dietz were a part of the *Salii*, as attested by the *Fasti Salii Palatini* fragments, but their ages remain uncertain. Since Dietz does not enlighten us on his methods of knowing the ages of the *Salii* priests in question, it is not possible to consider these cases as child priests for certain. Dietz also suggests that the *Salii* had an age requirement between the ages of 10–20 years old and sees the cases of younger priests as only an exception to this rule due to their role in the imperial family.[34]

Jörg Rüpke, Anne Glock, and David Richardson have a total of 135 cases of individual *Salii* in their *Fasti Sacerdotum*, although not all the names of the priests have survived, let alone their ages. I have analyzed all 113 surviving priests and their probable age calculations.[35] For most of the priests, it is not possible to determine any age for their joining the priesthood. I have gathered a list of 64 *Salii* whose ages are known to some extent. Many of the cases (12 instances) have a *terminus ante quem* for their joining the priesthood that ends in their twenties. They might have received the office very young but, at the latest, in their twenties. Other cases (12 instances) have quite a wide age range for their joining, as in the aforementioned case of Balbinus. All of these individuals had still joined the priesthood in their twenties at the latest. Excluding the aforementioned cases, there are 23 individuals who began in the priesthood at the age of 20 or before. At least five of them began at the office before 15. Similarly, there are 15 cases where we know that the person was in their twenties when they received the office.

It seems that most entered the *Salii* in their teens or early twenties. Recent research on the *Salii* agrees on the young age of the priests.[36] When considering the requirement of *patrimi et matrimi* and all the known cases of child *Salii*, it seems clear that the *Salii* had to begin in the office as a child or a youth. Whether they were still actually children and had not gone through the *toga virilis* ceremony has been under debate.[37] Mario Torelli has even

32 P. Cornelius Dolabella was approximately 18 when he became a *Salius Palatinus* in 38 CE: *FS* 1323. Q. Pompeius Sosius Falco was 19 or younger when he became a *Salius Palatinus*: *FS* 2765. M. Junius Silanus died at the age of 20 while having been a *Salius* and a *decemvir*: *CIL* VI 1439; *FS* 2136. Lucius Nonius Quintilianus died at the age of 24 while having been a *Salius* and an augur: *CIL* IX 4855; *FS* 2535.

33 According to Dietz, a Marcus Annius Flavius Libo became a *Salii* at six in 178 CE, a Quintus Tineius Sacerdos at ten in 170 CE, and a Vettius Sabinianus at ten in 199 CE. Dietz also lists that a Lucius Roscius Aelianus Paculus left the *Salii* in 170 CE when he was fifteen, and the same year L. Annius Ravus left the priesthood when he was sixteen. Dietz 1976, 411.

34 Dietz 1976, 412.

35 A possible case of a female *Salii* is considered below, with other individual cases of child priests.

36 Habinek 2005, 17–19; Glinister 2011, 120.

37 Some scholars have insisted that one could not have entered the *Salii* before receiving the toga of adulthood. This idea has been so persistent that scholars such as Cesare Letta have even based their dating calculations on that. Letta 2000.

suggested that the rituals of the *Salii* acted as rites of passage.[38] Many researchers have since developed this idea further and suggest that the rituals of the *Salii* had an initiatory nature that could have acted as rites of passage as well.[39] This could be a way to explain the young age of the *Salii*, but this would leave the question of the religious status of the *Salii*.[40]

3 Priests of Vulcan in Ostia

The most important cult in the ancient harbor town of Ostia was that of Vulcan, who was the town's patron god. In charge of the cult and the town's religious life was the Pontifex of Vulcan, who worked in the cult with two or three praetors and two aediles who were perhaps organized hierarchically by their numbering.[41] The cult activities and responsibilities remain quite unknown to us. Interestingly, the offices of praetors and aediles of Vulcan were often held by children.

Maria Letizia Caldelli lists all known praetors and aediles of the Ostian cult of Vulcan.[42] She counts a total of 57 known priests. In addition, I have found a case that is not on her list, making the total number of known individual priests of Vulcan, 58.[43] Most of them come from the surviving epigraphic priest listings of Ostia (the *Fasti Ostienses*), but others come from individual funerary inscriptions. It is not possible to name many of the individual priests due to the fragmentary nature of the inscriptions, let alone determine their ages. Of all the known priests of Vulcan, I have been able to determine an age for eight individuals (one of them is not listed by Caldelli). These all come from funerary inscriptions, except for one. Six of these priests are children, and the other two are youths.[44] All the inscriptions can be roughly dated to the first and the second centuries CE. Here, as with funerary inscriptions more generally, it is safe to assume that families mentioned the deceased's age only if it were somehow atypical (i. e., particularly young or old age) and only if the family could afford to add the extra information to the inscription.

The funerary inscriptions usually mention merely the name, occupation, and age of the deceased, like in the case of Lucius Aurelius Fortunatianus, who passed away at the age of 4 and had been the first praetor of Vulcan (*praetor primo sacer Volkani*).[45] The in-

38 Torelli 1990, 95–102.

39 Glinister 2011, 119–123; Guittard 2013, 181–183.

40 Did they reach the status of an adult in these rituals, or did they have to go through the *toga virilis* ceremony separately? Or was the idea for them to remain in a between state, a liminal state, in the priesthood to conduct the rituals? These questions require further study.

41 Meiggs 1973, 177–179, 337–343; Licordari 1984, 347–348; Pellegrino 1986, 296–298; Zevi 2009, 503–505, 509–511; Zevi 2012, 559–560; Caldelli 2014, 2–3, 13–14.

42 Her article "Fasti dei sacerdoti del culto di Vulcano ad Ostia" from 2014 is crucial for the study of the cult.

43 The priest that Caldelli does not have in her article comes from a fragmented funerary inscription that is missing the name of the deceased. *AE* 1988, 211.

44 *CIL* XIV 306, 341, 5379, 376; *AE* 1988 211; *AE* 1996 304; *AE* 1986 112. Youths: *CIL* XIV 351, 4648.

45 *CIL* XIV 306.

scription has been generally dated to the second half of the second century CE. Fortunatianus is the youngest known praetor of Vulcan. Another particularly young priest is Aulus Caedicius Saecularis, who died at the age of five and had been a praetor of Vulcan (*praetor sacer Volkani*). He lived in the second century.[46] His title is merely written as praetor without any indication of a more specific position. The dating of the inscription sets it as the earliest example of a child priest of Vulcan.

Publius Lucilius Gamala held the office of third praetor and aedile of Vulcan (*aedilis sacer Volcani eiusdem praetor tertio*) during his life according to an honorary inscription set for him. His age for entering the cult of Vulcan is uncertain since the two priesthoods are merely listed before the office of the decurion he had gotten as an *infans* (*decurioni adlecto decreto decurionum infanti*).[47] The offices might be listed chronologically in the inscription, as Russell Meiggs has suggested. Meiggs also states that the offices of praetors and aediles of Vulcan were merely a stepping stone to actual offices, and as such, they were usually the first offices one got. He even uses the term "junior priesthoods".[48] This would mean that young Gamala got at least one of the priestly offices as well as the office of a decurion very young, probably even before he had started his schooling outside the home. Usually, the term *infans* was used for children below the age of seven.[49] *Infans* is also a quite vague term when the actual age could have been mentioned. This could be because the exact age of Gamala was not known to the person ordering the inscription years later. The Gamalae were one of the most prominent families in Ostia, who also had a pontifex of Vulcan in their line. It is thus no wonder that a member of this family got an office in the cult of Vulcan so young and ended up holding two offices in it.[50]

Aulus Egrilius Magnus, who died at the age of 8, had only a short funerary inscription. He held the office of the first praetor of Vulcan by a degree of the local decurion council (*decurionum decreto praetori primo sacris Volkani faciundis*).[51] His parents were former slaves, but he seems to have been freeborn.[52] The inscription has two separate epitaphs, that of Aulus Egrilius Magnus and that of Aulus Egrilius Heliades, who was, with all likelihood, the father of the boy. This inscription has been roughly dated to the beginning of the second century.

Some funerary inscriptions give us more information about the lives of the deceased. This is, for example, the case of Marcus Cornelius Valerianus Epagathianus, who was of equestrian status (*eques Romanus*) and had been a decurion, an imperial flamen and a second praetor of Vulcan (*flamen praetor II sacer Volkani*) among many other things before he died at the age of 12.[53] The inscription has been dated to the end of the second century.

46 *AE* 1986, 112.
47 *CIL* XIV 376.
48 Meiggs 1973, 177–178, 338 note 7.
49 For determining *infans,* see e. g., Rawson 2003, 75, 136–142; Parkin 2010, 99–103.
50 Pontifex of Vulcan: Meiggs 1973, 177, 337. About the Gamalae: Meiggs 1973, 493–502; Caldelli 2014, 2, 18.
51 *AE* 1996, 304.
52 Caldelli 2014, 16.
53 *CIL* XIV 341.

The order of his offices mentioned in the inscription could be a chronological one, which would mean that he got the religious offices of flamen and praetor after having gotten the office of decurion first. This could mean that he got the priesthoods at a very young age, well before his death.

Another inscription also describes a child having multiple priesthoods. The name of the prematurely deceased has not survived, but the child had died at the age of 12 and had been a decurion, a praetor of Vulcan, as well as a flamen in the cults of Septimius Severus and Pertinax (*decurion Ostiensi praetor sacer Vulcani flamen divus Severus et divus Pertinax*).[54] He was also of equestrian status (*eques Romanus*). The piece of the sarcophagus where the inscription has partly survived has not been soundly dated.

The final example of a child priest of Vulcan is Numerius Trebonius Venerius, who had been an aedile of Vulcan by a degree of the decurion (*decreto decurionum aedilis allectus sacris Volcani faciundis*) before he died at the age of 13. His parents were both freedmen.[55] He is described merely as an aedile without any further specification. He lived approximately in the second half of the second century. His parents must have achieved a good position in society after reaching their freedom since their son could get an office in the most important cult of the town, and they could afford such a lengthy funerary inscription for him.

In addition to these examples, we have a few other examples of the priests of Vulcan who died in their youth but not in their childhood. Since we only know the age of their death, we do not know when they got their priesthoods exactly.[56] Caldelli also proposes that a Publius Attius Silianus who had been a praetor of Vulcan probably died very young as well since his funerary inscription does not mention any other career and his father had had the epitaph made for him.[57]

Many researchers believe that the praetors and aediles of Vulcan came from the local elite and aristocracy, although some examples of a child priest being a *puer novus* and lifting the family status have been accepted as well.[58] Caldelli suggests that customs within the priesthoods changed through time. During the reign of Commodus, Ostia became more prominent and visible; thus, its main cult became more prestigious. From this period onwards, the praetors and aediles of Vulcan came from a higher status than before when priesthoods could have been given to children of freedmen as well.[59]

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54 Caldelli has not noted this case in her listing of the Ostian priests of Vulcan. *AE* 1988, 211.

55 *CIL* XIV 5379.

56 Some priests of Vulcan who died young: at the age of 19: *CIL* XIV 351; in their twenties: *CIL* XIV 4648. Some fragmentary inscriptions of priests of Vulcan had shown the age of the deceased, but the parts telling the age have been mostly destroyed. As the age of the deceased was often mentioned when it was somehow unusual, we could presume that these epitaphs were probably also dedicated to children or youth. *AE* 1986, 111; *CIL* XIV 432.

57 Caldelli 2014, 19; *AE* 1988 202.

58 Zevi 2009, 510. Laes sees this as a specifically aristocratic habit but accepts the possibility of a *puer novus* in some cases of child officeholders in general. Laes 2004, 178, 184.

59 Caldelli 2014, 20–22.

All the inscriptions describing the child priests in the cult of Vulcan have been dated between the first century CE until the end of the second century. At least during this period, children seemed to hold the offices quite often, but it is clear that the cult of Vulcan had been active in Ostia long before this period. The *fasti* and the child priests might be a consequence of the cult growing or changing customs even earlier than Caldelli suggests. It is more probable, though, that the scarcity of surviving evidence on the cult before this is due to the lack of a common epigraphic habit before this, the greater distance in time, and the likelihood of reusing old stone slabs.[60] It is difficult to determine whether there were child priests before this because very little evidence survives on the praetors or aediles of the cult from earlier periods.

Based on the surviving *fasti* listing, Meiggs and Caldelli have also proposed that these offices were temporary. They claim that the offices lasted only for a year, because the names in the lists of priests change yearly.[61] In that case, it would mean that the child priests did not continue in their offices to adulthood. It is also probable that a person could hold many different offices even in the same cult since they only lasted for a year, which would explain the above cases where a person is mentioned as having had many offices. The short period of office holding could lead to a situation where eligible candidates may have become scarce. Because of the scarcity, children were also taken into consideration. The temporality of the offices might have been one of the changes in the cult that led to the increase of the epigraphic evidence concerning the offices. If more people were holding the offices, then the chances for them appearing in inscriptions would grow. If more inscriptions are being created, it is more likely that more instances of these inscriptions would survive to the present day.

Many of the cases of the priests of Vulcan also mention that the local decurion council had decreed that the office of a praetor or an aedile would be given to a certain person.[62] This underlines the importance of the cult and its priests in local politics.

The question remains: why were so many of the praetors and aediles in the Ostian cult of Vulcan children? Was there something in the nature of these offices that made children a good choice to hold them? Or was it just convenient? At first, Meiggs presents the aediles and praetors as mere assistants of the Pontifex of Vulcan. Later, Meiggs interprets that a certain fragmentary inscription from the *fasti Ostienses* in the year 91 CE might hint that the aediles of Vulcan had appeased the god after a bolt of lightning struck. Meiggs suggests that this might have been one of the roles that at least the aediles had. He backs this claim with other inscriptions around Ostia that mention "divine lightning" (*fulgur divum*), claiming that 'appeasing lightning' could have been a part of the customs in the cult of Vulcan.[63] Meiggs' suggestion of the aediles acting in an appeasing role is appealing. There is other evidence of children having these kinds of appeasing roles in religious ritu-

60 Throughout the Roman world, the amount of epigraphic evidence multiplies drastically during the first century CE and other cults begin documenting their proceedings as well, as is the case with the *Salii* as seen above. See eg. Beltrán Lloris 2014.

61 Meiggs 1973, 338; Caldelli 2014, 14.

62 I.e. *CIL* XIV 375; *CIL* XIV 4553; *CIL* XIV 376; *CIL* XIV 349; *CIL* XIV 412; *CIL* XIV 415.

63 Meiggs 1973, 338. The inscription: *CIL* XIV 4294.

als, such as the Republican-era rites of crisis and the *ludi saeculares* festivals.[64] Since children were seen as perfect agents for appeasing the gods, then, such an association could explain why the aediles were often, if not always, children.

At least three of the young priests of Vulcan were also imperial *flamines*. The abovementioned M. Cornelius Valerianus Epagathianus is depicted holding many administrative offices in addition to the religious offices of a praetor of Vulcan and a flamen. The anonymous 12-year-old praetor of Vulcan was also a flamen in the imperial cults of Septimius Severus and Pertinax. Similarly, a Faustinus who passed away at the age of 21 (or 25 depending on how one interprets the fragmentary edge of the inscription) had with all likelihood been a praetor (or an aedile) of Vulcan as well as a flamen of Pertinax.[65] All these instances can mean that being an imperial *flamen* could have been deemed a suitable office for children and youths similar to the praetorship and aedileship of Vulcan. This goes hand in hand with Meiggs' theory that the imperial *flamines* were also one of the lower offices used as stepping stones to other offices.[66]

4 Individual Cases of Child Priests

Other examples of child priests come from a wide geographical range of epigraphic evidence on different local priesthoods. They are also the only known cases of children in these offices. The cults and priesthoods can also be quite obscure due to scarce local evidence. The cases will be considered beginning with the youngest known priest and continuing in age order.

A testimony of an especially young priest comes from the Alban Hills close to Rome. A Gaius Nonius Ursus was a "Cabensis priest" (*sacerdos cabensis*) and a curion when he died at the age of two. He was an alumnus of a Gaius Nonius Iustinus who also served as a *sacerdos cabensis* as well as a haruspex.[67] The inscription has been dated to the Trajanic era. Gaius Nonius Iustinus was himself of equestrian status, but the status of his alumnus Ursus is not completely clear although the office of a curion was often given to youths of equestrian status.[68] The *sacerdotes cabenses* priesthood is attested only in four inscriptions, and no other evidence of it has survived.[69] The nature of the cult and its priesthoods is thus completely unknown. The inscriptions only mention that the cult is connected to the Alban hills (*montis Albani*). It has been suggested that the cult may have something to do with the town of Cabum or with the cult of Juppiter Latiaris on the Cavo mountain.[70] The priesthood of "Cabensis" could have been hereditary, as the caretaker of young Ur-

64 See e. g. Mantle 2003; Vuolanto 2010.
65 *CIL* XIV 4648.
66 Meiggs 1973, 177–178, 338.
67 *CIL* VI 2174; *FS* 2538. The funerary inscription for C. Nonius Iustinus (*FS* 2530): *CIL* VI 2175.
68 Granino Cecere 1996, 280–282; Haack 2002, 88–90.
69 Granino Cecere 1996.
70 Scheid & Granino Cecere 1999, 107.

sus also held the office. Maria Grazia Granino Cecere suggests that the hereditary nature could explain the young age of Ursus.[71] She also has another possibly quite young example of a Cabensis priest in her article. A Gaius Antistius had acted as a Cabensis priest before he died, and his father had the funerary inscription made for him. His age of death is fragmented, only an X has survived indicating that he was at least over ten years old. The fact that his age was mentioned at all would suggest that he died quite young, as well as the fact that his father was the one to set up the inscription for him.[72] This could hint that having very young priests in the priesthood was not unusual.

A well-known example of a child priest is Flavia Vera, a *praesula* (a leading dancer or leader) in a cult called "*tusculanorum*" when she died at the age of six.[73] The inscription dates to the second century CE. There is no filiation in the name of Flavia Vera, which raises the question of her status. Despite this, it is possible to deduct from the fragmented ending of the inscription that it was set by Flavius or Flavia (probably a family member). The original location of the inscription is unknown.

Her case has intrigued many scholars, because the actual cult that she was part of is not specified. Thus, some researchers have made their own suggestions. Beryl Rawson proposes that Flavia Vera was a priestess in the cult of Diana in Tusculum since we know from other sources that such a cult existed there.[74] Fay Glinister, on the other hand, speculates with the possibility that Flavia Vera was part of the *Saliae Virgines* as the *Salii* priests had a known branch in Tusculum, and *praesul* was a known office among the *Salii*.[75] The only mention of the female branch of the *Salii* comes from Festus. He clarifies the meaning of *Salias Virgines* by using Cincius and Aelius Stilo as his sources in his *De verborum significatu*. According to Festus, the *Saliae* are female versions of the *Salii*, similarly wearing the apex headpiece and clad in armor (*paludatas cum apicibus in modum Saliorum*) as they participate in a sacrifice at the regia with the Pontifex Maximus (*sacrificium facere in Regia cum pontifice*).[76] If a female branch of the *Salii* existed, it is probable that they also began in the office very young.[77]

It has not been taken into account with the case of Flavia Vera that there are other inscriptions mentioning Tusculan priests of similar date.[78] The epigraphic material consists only of a few inscriptions. Thus, the possible Tusculan cult remains unknown. Some scholars have suggested that it had perhaps something to do with the cult of Castor and Pollux.[79] Flavia Vera could have been connected to these other priests of Tusculum. In-

71 Granino Cecere 1996, 282.

72 This inscription is dated between the 1st century to the first half of the 2nd century CE. Granino Cecere 1996, 279–280. As discussed above, Roman demographic realities meant children usually lost their fathers at quite a young age. Rawson 2003, 132, 220–228, 338; Laes 2011, 28–29.

73 *CIL* VI 2177.

74 Rawson 2003, 324–325.

75 The *Salii* priests are considered with more detail above. Glinister 2011, 112.

76 Fest. 329 M / 18 L.

77 Glinister compares them to the Vestal Virgins. Glinister 2011, 110–111.

78 *CIL* V 27; *CIL* VI 19875; *CIL* IX 2565.

79 Scheid & Granino Cecere 1999, 112–113.

triguingly, the inscriptions mentioning the Tusculan cult have all been found from a quite vast geographical area. One comes from modern-day Pula in Croatia, one from modern Bojano in the region of Molise, and one from Rome. Perhaps the cult was not necessarily even connected to the city of Tusculum but bore a similar name for some other reason.

An honorary inscription to a Coelia Tertulla on a statue base describes that at the age of seven, she was degreed by the local decurion council (*decurionum decreto sacerdotium datum est*) to be the first priestess of Diva Augusta (*sacerdos Divae Augustae*) in all the *municipium* (*prima omnium in municipio*) of Larinum. The honorary statue with its inscription was set up by the grandmother of the young priestess, Gabbia Tertulla.[80] The inscription was found from the site of ancient Larinum and it has been dated between 41–54 CE. The statue itself has not survived as the statue base was reused already in Roman antiquity. The exact status of Coelia Tertulla is not certain, but she was probably part of the local elite, as the *gens Coelii* was a prominent family in the area, which is attested in other inscriptions.[81] The imperial cults for divine empresses often had women as their priests, but to my knowledge, there are no other examples of such young priestesses. The previously presented cases from Ostia had some examples of children as imperial *flamines*, thus, children were clearly not unheard of in the offices of the imperial cult.

Another young priestess was a certain Petilia Secundina, who was a priestess of Minerva (*sacerdos Minervae*) when she died at the age of nine.[82] Her sarcophagus was found reused in the base of a palace in the town of Giovinazzo near modern-day Bari. In all likelihood, Petilia Secundina had lived nearby in ancient Butuntum, which had a temple of Minerva according to tradition. Petilia's mother, Messia Dorcas, had set up the sarcophagus with the inscription for her. Petilia was freeborn, but her mother's name could suggest a freed status at some point in the family line. The inscription has been dated between the end of the second century and the third century CE.[83] The priests of Minerva often held other religious offices in other cults as well (i.e., with the Capitoline triad), making the case of Petilia Secundina even more special, because she seems to have only held the one priesthood.[84] Perhaps she only held one office because of her young age.

5 Child Priests from the Imperial Family

The imperial family differed from other Roman families and realities. The customs of the imperial family cannot be used to get a general picture of the habits of the Roman population; nevertheless, they bring up interesting points of comparison. Family continuity and prestige were important to Romans in general, but to the imperial family, even more so than

80 *AE* 1991, 514a.
81 De Caro 1991, 268–270.
82 *CIL* IX 307.
83 Fioriello 2007, 32–34.
84 *AE* 1990 202.

others.[85] It is thus not surprising to find evidence that the children, and especially the heirs of the rulers, were given many offices, religious and political, when they were still children.

The model for this behavior comes from the grandchildren of Augustus, Gaius and Lucius. They both got important religious offices when they were on the verge of adulthood. Gaius got the office of Pontifex when he was fifteen and received the *toga virilis* in 5 BCE.[86] Lucius became an augur 3 BCE before he received the toga of adulthood when he was fourteen years old.[87] It is also probable that they both became members of Arval Brethren at a quite young age, according to John Scheid in his vast work on the priesthood.[88] Similarly, during the Julio-Claudian dynasty, Tiberius Gemellus received the priesthood of the Arval Brethren in 33 CE at fourteen.[89] As is mentioned above, a possible heir to Claudius, Lucius Junius Silanus, became a *Salii* at 12 in 43 CE.[90] This was, of course, a quite normal age to enter the *Salii* and thus not only a dynastic measure. Many of these priesthoods (pontifex, augur, *arvales*) were quite prominent and not generally known for young priests, which is probably why the scions of the imperial family did not take these offices as small children, but only when they were on the cusp of adulthood.

After this, emperors did not have the chance to raise their heirs from childhood because the dynasties changed more often, so the possibility of using young children in dynastic measures did not really exist until the Antonine dynasty. As seen above, Marcus Aurelius became a *Salii* priest at the age of eight (129 CE) according to the *Historia Augusta*. He held the offices of a *praesul*, a *vates*, and a *magister* in the priesthood already in his youth.[91] He was a son of patrician parents and did not become an heir to the emperor until his adulthood, thus, his position in the *Salii* was not because of dynastic motivations. His son Commodus, on the other hand, was born to be the heir to the emperor, and he was brought up with this in mind. Commodus was inducted to "all the priesthoods" when he was fourteen (175 CE), according to the *Historia Augusta*.[92] Later on, M. Iulius Severus Philippus was co-opted into all colleges before he was even ten (247 CE). He was the son of the emperor and was elevated to rule by his father's side just before his death at twelve (249 CE).[93]

The evidence of child priests in the imperial family is scarce. Nevertheless, the few known examples do provide us with a different approach to child priests than the other categories in this paper. The priesthoods that the children of the imperial family got were not typically given to children or even youths. At the same time, they were very notable religious offices. These individuals' high status was probably more important than the

85 On children as part of imperial and dynastic ideas, see: Rawson 2003, 31–42, 60–70; Laes 2004, 147–152; Joska 2018.

86 Dio 55, 9, 4; *FS* 2010; Laes 2004, 149.

87 Dio 55, 9, 10; 55, 10, 6; *FS* 2011; Laes 2004, 149.

88 Scheid 1975, 62–63, 162.

89 Scheid 1975, 164–165; *FS* 2012.

90 More on the *Salii*, see above. *CIL* VI 37162; *FS* 2130.

91 *HA Aur.* 4, 3–4; *FS* 800.

92 *HA Comm.* 12, 1; *FS* 820.

93 *FS* 2064. His priestly offices are attested to him by numismatic evidence (minted before 247 CE) presenting priestly symbols. *RIC* IV Philip I 215.

relatively young age when they became priests. Giving public roles to children earlier to underline their role as heirs to the family and thus promoting the continuity and prestige of the family, is another aspect linked to child priests in general. The habit was probably common with other elite families as well, not just with the imperial family, as Laes brings forth.[94] Indeed, it is probable that some of the cases of individual child priests discussed above were also a part of these kinds of dynastic measures.

6 Actual Responsibilities? Or Honorary Offices?

Previous research has suggested that the political and religious offices children held were mainly representational and meant to be honorary. Nevertheless, Laes admits that religious tasks, especially priesthoods, seemed to hold more actual responsibilities for children.[95] When considering all the source material represented here, in addition to the vast evidence of children in other religious roles, it is possible to form a clear picture of the phenomenon of child priests. Children holding religious offices was a relatively normal occurrence, not only a peculiarity. In some priesthoods or cults, the evidence suggests that installing children as priests was extremely common.[96] A main division in these priesthoods is that some took only children for the office, and for others, children might have been occasional officeholders. Whether these offices actually entailed religious duties is another question.

Young Vestal Virgins participated in rituals and had some responsibilities in addition to studying. The child Vestals were clad in ritual vestments that only people who could perform sacrifices could wear. The *Salii* priests had their rituals with vigorous dancing and other possible unknown duties. Many of the priests were children or youths, and to our knowledge, they performed the rituals with the other priests. The rituals of the priests of Vulcan in Ostia are less known, although their roles were perhaps linked to appeasing actions. Considering all this evidence, it is clear that children must have had ritual duties associated with their offices. Children were important religious agents who were needed in specific contexts.

The age range of the child priests considered in this paper is quite wide. The youngest being a two-year-old and the oldest approaching their twenties. We can assume that rituals in the cults followed tradition and thus were the same despite the age of the priests. Children are capable of performing many complicated tasks from a young age onwards, so the rituals were likely mainly conducted according to tradition. The youngest priests might have had merely assistive duties, or they might have had help to perform their ritual duties. No evidence of these realities has survived.

94 Laes 2004, 152–157.

95 Laes 2004, 149, 181–184. Some individual cases are usually filed as honorary offices and curiosities. *AE* 1990, 202; *AE* 1991, 514 a; Fioriello 2007, 34.

96 A large portion of the source material comes from funerary evidence, so it does not represent the actual frequency of the customs.

7 Why Children?

It has been established that children were needed in certain religious tasks and offices, but what made children special? I propose that children were deemed religiously special and thus more suitable for certain tasks.[97] This religious nature connected to children can be traced from the vocabulary used to describe children in religious roles. They were usually described as pure and were at least socially liminal since they were not yet full-fledged participants of the society. At least the Vestal Virgins and the *Salii* were required to be *patrimi et matrimi* when they began in the office. It was a common prerequisite for children in other ritual tasks like participating in a choir or a procession. All existing literary sources mention the requirement to be *patrimi et matrimi* in the context of religion and children. *Patrimi et matrimi* is sometimes even used as a synonym for a child acting in religious practices.[98] The requirement of having both of your parents still alive could spring from ideas of religious purity that were common in Rome.[99] Death was religiously polluting, but very common, so a child with both parents alive was auspicious and perhaps especially pure.

The religiously special quality of children applied to the priestly offices where one had to begin at the office as a child, i. e., the Vestal Virgins, the *Salii*, and perhaps the priests of Vulcan in Ostia. The other priesthoods probably had other factors for why children held the offices at least occasionally. Family continuity and prestige have already been considered likely factors for some of the children receiving priestly offices. Another possibility is that an early admittance to a priesthood was a means of religious education, and the child priests were learning the trade while performing it, which is true in the case of the Vestal Virgins, who spent their first ten years in the office learning their responsibilities. Indeed, it is likely that religious education and socialization were seen as, at least, useful aspects of children participating in religious tasks. They were presumably not the main reasons for children's participation as children were also religiously special.

Abbreviations

AE =	*L'Année Épigraphique*. Presses universitaires de France.
CIL =	*Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berolini.
FS =	*Fasti Sacerdotum. A Prosopography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome, 300 BC to AD 499*. 2008. Oxford University Press.
PIR =	*Prosopographia imperii romani saec I. II. III*. De Grüyter.
RIC =	*The Roman Imperial Coinage*. Spink and Son.

97 More on what I call 'children's religious ontology' in my forthcoming PhD thesis.

98 For instance, Servius even leaves the word child out: Serv. *Georg.* 1.31: *...ex quibus nuptiis patrimi et matrimi nascebantur...* See also Wildfang 2006, 44.

99 On Roman ideas of purity, see Lennon. 2014.

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Building for the Gods: Builders, Sculptors and Decorators in the Selected Partho-Roman Eastern Temples[1]

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Abstract:
Research on ancient religions concentrates mostly on the gods, the architecture of the temples and cultic personnel. There is not much said about the people who created the places of worship. This paper concentrates on the builders, sculptors and decorators of temples in the Near East from the 1st century BCE to the 3rd century CE, attested in the epigraphic sources from Hatra, Palmyra and Nabatea. It presents the names of the craftsmen working for the gods as well as their duties within the service they offer for the temples. Through the means of linguistics and prosopography, this paper will provide an analysis of the erecting of places of worship from the builders' perspective.

Key words: craftsmen, people, temples, Near East, religions.

The sanctuaries of the Near East in Roman and Parthian periods (1st century BCE to 3rd century CE) look impressive even now, in the state of ruins. The scale of the buildings is stunning and fulfills its basic role: to praise the glory of the gods and provide a place of worship to the devotees. Columns, blocks and remains of decorations are still amazing people who see them. Vitruvius dedicated in his *De Architectura* an entire book concerning building the temples.[2] The norms of this Roman architect and engineer are gathered in 3 words: *firmitas, utilitas* and *venustas* (strength, utility and beauty), applied also to the temples erected in the beginning of Roman era in the East. The houses of gods were de-

1 This paper is dedicated to the memory of Marianna Góźdź, one of many (re)builders of Warsaw after World War II and a wonderful grandmother. This research was financed by the Polonez Bis 1 grant (NCN) project Al-At. People of the gods. I want to thank John F. Healey and Michał Gawlikowski for their careful and detail remarks on a draft version of this paper. For improving the English of this chapter I am indebted to Sophia de Medeiros.

2 De arch. III.

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signed to last forever, therefore they needed to present the highest value of work and craft. Looking at the Near Eastern temples of the studied period, it seems that the architects and builders were aware of the descriptions of Vitruvius, combining two building traditions: classical and oriental and adapting solutions into a different cultural ground. The temples were regarded as heavenly spaces, reflections of the heavenly court of the deities. That is beneath the reason of rendering these places splendid.

There is not much said about the people who physically created the places of worship. What do we know about the builders and decorators of the cultic places? Do we know any names, their role in the society and their inclinations in the cultic sphere? The epigraphic evidence together with the archaeological remains from Hatra in Northern Mesopotamia, Palmyra in Syria and Wadi Ramm in Arabia from the times between 1st century BCE and 3rd century CE will serve as a source of knowledge about the people who constructed and embellished the temples. Builders, architects, sculptors and decorators go together in crafting the places of worship, making them beautiful for the divine glory. Their work needed to correlate with the conceptual projects of the buildings as well as to follow the newest trends and achievements of civilizations. This paper, through the means of prosopography, will sketch a portrait of the people who worked to emphasize the splendor of the gods by constructing the cultic places. Beside the people and their families, this paper will point specific terminology concerning professions to understand the role of the craftsmen and craftsmanship in the context of ancient religions and societies of the Partho-Roman East.

Epigraphical and prosopographical evidence

1 Hatra

Hatra in the Northern Mesopotamia was an important religious center with the complex of temples built in the central part of the city, separated from the rest of the urban space with a massive wall (thick on 1.4 m).[3] Hatra as a city evolved around this complex, circumscribing the divine protection to Shamash, the Sun god called in the inscriptions Maran – Our Lord.[4] The role of religion in the urban life is emphasized by the numerous inscriptions and coins.[5]

Within the epigraphic evidence, one finds 30 Aramaic texts referring directly, by a profession or a particular verb, to the people who made sculptures and constructed sacred buildings or their parts.[6] A group of 6 inscriptions concerns members of a family who

3 For religious life in Hatra see Kaizer 2000, Jakubiak 2013, Dirven 2005–2006, 367.

4 Foietta 2018, 109, Kubiak-Schneider 2022, 795.

5 For Hatra of Shamash see Kubiak-Schneider 2022. Corpora of Hatrene inscriptions: Aggoula 1991, Beyer 1997, Vattioni 1981, Bucci and Moriggi 2019. The usual way of designating the Hatrene epigraphic material is as follows: H and number, e.g. H1, H107, etc.

6 They are all collected and analyzed in Aggoula 1988.

exercised the professions of master-builders or architects and sculptors.[7] To this family belongs Barnannai and his sons Zebidu and Yhabshai as well as his father Yhabshai, all of whom were involved in this branch of craftmanship.[8] The concentration of inscriptions concerning this family is in the Great Temenos and Iwans, so the main cultic area of Hatra. We learn about them already in the inscription H1:

1. *brnny br yhbš[y]*
2. *ʾrdklʾ wbnyh/*
3. *glpʾ*[9]

Barnanai, son of Yhabšai, master-builder and his sons the sculptors.

The profession of *ardīklā* was exercised by Barnanai son of Yhabšai. The sons of this Barnanai are known by their names from different texts. They are mentioned for instance in the inscription H106:

1. *[z]bydw wyhbšy*
2. *[bny] brnny ʾrdklʾ*
3. *br yhbšy ʾrdklʾ*
4. *dy ʾlhʾ bḥlmʾ*
5. *ʾlp hnw*

Zebidu and Yhabshai, sons of Barnanai, the master-builder, son of Yhabshai, the master-builder,[10] whom the god taught this in a dream.

This text attests an oracular activity experienced by Zebidu and Yhabshai (the younger). A deity, not specified by name, instructed them in a dream for, probably, an image in the bas-relief of so-called Hatrene Gorgon carved beside the inscription.[11] Furthermore, the inscription H336 a) mentions only Yhabshai labelled as sculptor:

1. *glp yhbšy br bnny.*

Yhabshai, son of Barnannai has sculpted (this*).*

This inscription with tiny letters painted on black is a signature beside the relief of an eagle (Fig. 1 and 2.). To compare, the inscription placed below the representation of the bird is carved deeply and letters are of a regular size. Yhabshai was the author of the relief of an eagle, and possibly made the legal text mentioning a council of the gods and people

7 H1, H2, H46, H106, H234 and H336. For understanding the Aramaic term *ʾrdklʾ* (*ardīklā*) see below.
8 See below.
9 Transliteration modified after Vattioni 1981 and Beyer 1997. All the translations are by the author of this chapter.
10 The Aramaic term *ʾrdklʾ* is usually translated as "architect". In the purposes of this article, I adopt the translation "master-builder". For the commentary on this word see below.
11 For Hatrene Gorgon see Dijkstra 2013.

of Hatra. The decree placed below the image of the bird brings over the exact point in time, being proclaimed in the month Kanun (November/December) 151 CE. It gives the insight into the period of activity of the family of Yhabshai, who must have been operating around mid-2nd century CE.

Text H46

1. *glp ʾdy wzbydw wy[hbšy]*

Addai, Zebidu and Yhabshai have sculpted (this)

was carved on the architrave of the doors in the central sanctuary in the Great Temenos. Despite being reconstructed, we can suppose that this inscription mentions the two brothers known from the texts cited before. We do not know if Addai was another member of the family or an associated sculptor.

The family of Barnanai is not the only family whose active work as builders and sculptors in Hatra is attested epigraphically. In the inscriptions we find a certain Ogga Zaroqa and his relatives also active in the mid-2nd century CE.[12] They are mentioned for example in the inscription, or rather the group of 5 texts[13] carved on one monument (stone altar: *mknʾ*):

a. *mknʾ dsnṭrwq mryʾ*
The Altar of Sanatruq the lord.
b. *1.ʿgʾ zrqʾ br ʿglyʾ/ 2. ʿglyʾ ʾrdklʾ/ 3.dbrmryn ʾlhʾ/ 4.dḫpyw wqššʾ*
Ogga Zaroqa, son of Ogeilia.[14] Ogeilia the master-builder of Barmarin, the god, the laying over and the elder.
c. *1.šmšyhb br ʿglyʾ/ 2.ʾrdklʾ/ 3.bnʾ/ 4.bbtʾ dmrn*
Shamshihab, son of Ogeilia, the master-builder, has constructed at home of Maran.
d. *mkn dmrʾ* - Altar of the Lord.
e. *1.mrn nšrʾ/ 2.šḫqth/ 3.bgn bbtk/ 4.lmn dlṭrh*
Our Lord, the Eagle, may you destroy him: the curse in your house for everyone who will not protect it.[15]

12 Only 2 inscriptions: H5 and H232. Datation is not as direct as in the case of H336, but it is because of the mention of the king Sanatruq I in H232.

13 H232 a-f).

14 The name of the father and the master-builder must be Ogeilia and not GGLY as Aggoula and Jakubiak postulated. The confusion results from a similar way of writing the letters *gimmel* and *ʿayn* in Hatrene Aramaic.

15 The translation of the part e) differs from the suggestions in the corpora. K. Beyer, B. Aggoula and F. Vattioni give 3 completely diverse translations and readings of the lines 3–4. Aggoula 1991 H232: *bgn bytk/ lmn dlṭrh – par la Fortune de ta maison celui qui l'attaque*. Beyer 1997 H232: *bgn bbtk/ lmn dlṭrh – Die Anrufung deines Auges (geschieht hiermit) zugunsten desjenigen, welcher ihn (=diesen Räucheraltar) schützen wird*. Vattioni 1981 H232: mn bjtk/ lmn *dlṭrḥ* - dalle tua casa chiunque la attacca. Looking at the drawing of B. Aggoula (Aggoula 1991, 113) one can observe that the second word in the line 3 is with two letters *bet* written smaller than the rest of the letters. The construction *dlṭrh*

f. *1.[rw]šmʾ/ 2.[dš]mšyhb/ 3.[ʾrdkl]ʾ/ 4.[dm]ḫymn/ 5.[l]mknʾ/ 6.[dmrn] nšrʾ*

The signature of Shamshihab, the master-builder who was entrusted with the altar of Our Lord, the Eagle.[16]

Ogeilia, the master-builder is also labelled as the elder and the one who lays over or covers the surface. The second term: *ḫpyw* indicates his possible specialization within the building profession specifying that Ogeilia was laying down the stone blocks. The rank of the elder specifies the hierarchy in the guild.

Such a professional guild of builders is attested in a different text (H207)

1. *ʿbnʾ ʾrdklʾ*
2. *wḥbryhy bnʾ*
3. *ʿšrtʾ dkyr lṭb*

ʿAbna, the master-builder and his fellows builders of the Ten. May he/they be remembered for good.

The same Ogga Zaroqa is mentioned as a sculptor (*glpʾ*) in the inscription H5 beneath a statue of a women commissioned by her husband, the priest of Atargatis:

1. *ṣlmtʾ dy smy brt ʿgʾ br*
2. *ʾštty br slwk dy ʾyqym lh ʿgʾ*
3. *bʿlh br ʾbʾ kmrʾ dʾtrʿtʾ*
4. *ʾbʾ glp br ʿgʾ zrqʾ ʾbʾ glp.*

The statue of Samya, daughter of Ogga, son of Ashattai, son of Seleukos, which set up for her Ogga, her husband, son of Abba, priest of Atargatis. Abba, the sculptor, son of Ogga Zaraqa. Abba, the sculptor.

Until now, all the epigraphic attestations of the word *ʾrdklʾ* come from the Great Temenos. The only evidence from the territory outside of the Hatrene great cultic area is inscription H403 found in the temple of Nabu (temple 12)[17]

1. *l[ṭb] dkyr šmšʿqb br ḥnynʾ ʾrdklʾ dbnʾ*
2. *ʾ[r]zʾ ḥdyn lnbw ʾlhʾ ʿl ḥyʾ bn[yhy wʾḥyhy] klkn*

---

should be read as negation (the *lamed* is well visible on the mentioned drawing of B. Aggoula but omitted by him in the transcription) of the verb *nṭr*. The word *bgn* is frequently used in the Hatrene epigraphy in the meaning of curse.

16 The part f) is also diversely read by the authors of the corpora. Aggoula 1991 H232: [*ʾqb]šmʾ/ [wš] mšyhb/ [bn]ʾ/ [m]ḫymn/ [m]lkn/ [br] nšrʾ*; Beyer 1997 H232: *[rw]šmʾ/ [dš]mšyhb/ [glp]ʾ/ [dm]ḫymn/ [l]mknʾ/ [br] nšrʾ*; Vattioni 1981, H232: šmʾ/ *[lšm]šjhb/ [ ]ʾ/ [m]ḥjmn/ [ml]kʾ/]nšrʾ*. Vattioni 1981 is the only one who provides also the part g) However no further inscription was spotted on the drawing by B. Aggoula. It was neither observed by K. Beyer nor by B. Aggoula himself.

17 For the temple see Al-Salihi 1983 and Jakubiak 2013, 112–113. Al-Salihi 1983 is also the *editio princeps* for the inscription H403, which does not enter the corpus of Aggoula and of Vattioni. For small temples in Hatra see Bucci within this volume.

For good memory. Shamshi'aqab, son of Honeina, the master-builder who built this temple (?) for Nabu, the god. For life of all his sons and his brothers.

This Shamshi'aqab is known from other inscriptions as a sculptor (*glp*) of an altar and of a relief.[18] Furthermore, he and a certain Barneshra contributed to the temple with a podium.[19] Barneshra is also attested as a sculptor of a relief depicting a solar deity.[20]

The text H232 mentioned above contains also the expression *ʾrdklʾ dbrmryn ʾlhʾ* - the architect of the god Barmarin. This phrase turns an attention to the particular relationship of the craftsman to the god. The theonym Barmarin means Son of Our Lords and was the divine child of god Maran-Shamash and the goddess Martan (probably Nanaia) from the civic triad of Hatra. Unfortunately, none of the Hatrene inscriptions makes this name equal with a non-transparent name.[21] Ogga was belonging to Barmarin as the member of the guild of builders being under the auspices of one of the civic deities. By the further epigraphic evidence from Hatra: texts H107 and H281, it seems that this particular god was a protector of those who build the Hatrene temples. The inscription H107 concerns a construction of a part of the great temple of Maran-Shamash, stating explicitly that the sanctuary dedicated to the highest god of Hatra was erected by his divine son Barmarin: *sgyl ḥyklʾ rbʾ dy bnʾ brmryn lšmš ʾbwhy* – Sagil, the great temple which Barmarin constructed for Shamash, his father.[22] Furthermore, the inscription H281 is a curse against destruction and robbery of tools belonging to the work or construction of Barmarin:

1. *bgn mrn wmrtn*
2. *wbrmryn ʿl mn dy*
3. *lnsb mškn ʾ ʾw*
4. *ḥṭmʾ ʾw mrʾ*
5. *wnrgʾ wksydʾ*
6. *wgblytʾ wmklʾ*
7. *wḥṣnʾ mn ʿbdʾ*
8. *dy brmryn wmn dy*
9. *lnsb ḥd mn grbʾ*
10. *ḥlyn mn dy brmryn*
11. *ḥwy ḥlmʾ dy*
12. *ʾrgmyt mrgym*.

The curse of Our Lord, Our Lady and Son of our Lord and our Lady over everyone who removes the deposit[23] or hammer or trowel or axe or chisel and tile mold and the lever and

18 H221, H237.
19 Al-Salihi 1983, 141.
20 H289.
21 For the new approach to the divine onomastics see Bonnet et al. 2018.
22 For the new edition of this inscription see Kubiak 2016, 341.
23 The word *mškn* in the context of this inscription should be translated as "pledge deposit" instead of "tent, dwelling place". This inscription contains information about tools and items which seem to

the axe which belongs to the work (service) of Barmarin and over whoever plunders this that is of Barmarin, the dream revealed: he is surely to be stoned.

All the mentioned tools belong to the service of Barmarin, i.e. to his building workshop and craftsmen guild. As the property of the god, the crimes like removing, taking away and steeling were punished severely by the death through stoning. As we do not have any mythological literature from the Parthian Hatra which would give us a glimpse on the structure of the divine world in this Northern Mesopotamian city, these inscriptions suggest that Barmarin could have been a deity of craft, especially of building and carving activities. If this is right, that the instructions in the dream are given to the sons of Barnannai in the inscription H106 by the god Barmarin and concern the iconographic program within the Great Temenos. Furthermore, the association of the Ten mentioned in the H207 could be the builders' guild being connected to the god.

2 Palmyra

Tadmor, called Palmyra in Greek and Latin sources, the city placed in the biggest oasis on the Syrian Desert hosted impressive temples from the Roman period (1st – 3rd century CE), such as the Temple of Bel, the Temple of Baalshamin, the Temple of Nabu and the Temple of Allat. In comparison to the Hatrene Aramaic epigraphic evidence concerning sculptors and architects in the sacred context, the Palmyrene (both Greek and Aramaic) textual dossier is scarce. Only one explicit mention of a building specialist exists noted in a Greek inscription:

1. *Ἀλέξανδρος ἀρχιτέκτ-*
2. *ων θεοῦ Βηλου ἐποίει.*

Alexandros, the master-builder (architect) of the god Bel, has made (it).[24]

Alexandros is associated to the highest Palmyrene civic god, dedicating his service to the temple. Being a master-builder of Bel can designate a function belonging to a particular workshop attached to and financed by the temple.[25]

The name of architect or master-builder appears alone without genealogy. I doubt that the architect had Palmyrene origins.[26] First of all, he would leave the inscription in the two languages: Aramaic and Greek. Secondly, he would habitually insert the names of his ancestors. Alexandros does not have to be Greek either. His name, even though of Greek origins, was very popular in, among others, the Near East.[27] According to Michał Gawlikowski, the project of the temple of Bel was commissioned to a skilled specialist who

be the temple deposit. It would be difficult to explain the physical removing of a dwelling place. In such a context the inscription would use the verb *šḥq*.

24 IGLS 17/1. 37.

25 See his commentary to the IGLS 17/1.37.

26 Yon 2002, 257.

27 See Yon 2018, 81 and 101.

knew the trends and Hellenistic art of building and the master builders must have come from some major city, probably Antioch-on-the-Orontes, the capital of Roman Syria.[28] Thus, Alexandros master-builder of Bel might have had Near Eastern origins.

Another Greco-Aramaic inscription does not state unequivocally if the concerned person was connected to the building profession.

1. *Μνησθῇ Ἀντίοχος*
2. *καθηγητής*
3. *dkyr ʾṭykʾ*
4. *sbrʾ.*
5. *dkyr ʾlhšʾ*
6. *br dynys*

Remembered be Antiochos, the leader (?). Remembered be A(n)tika (=Antiochos), the expert (master teacher). Remembered be Elahsha, son of Dionis (=Dionisos).[29]

This inscription concerns sort of an expert expressed in Aramaic by *sbrʾ* and *καθηγητής* in Greek. The latter means guide, teacher.[30] For the Aramaic term, the discussion in the Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions allows the eventual meaning as builder, specialist in craft.[31] The translation of J.-B. Yon ("le conducteur de travaux") indicates the engagement in the building activity.[32] Here the onomastic situation is like in the precedent text. Antiochos has no filiation, and his name is of the Greek origins. In contrast to the Alexandros' inscription, this text has an Aramaic version. First Aramaic sentence is a literal translation of the Greek. Second is an addition to the commemoration. There are at least 2 possibilities how to understand the people mentioned in this inscription. Jean Baptiste Yon suggests that Antiochos would be of Palmyrene origin.[33] But again we do not have any information about the filiation. Antiochos, the teacher was probably commemorated by Elahsha, son of Dionysus, his apprentice. The one who made a remembrance could be of Palmyrene origin and his master of craft might have been from outside of Palmyra and this can be an explanation of two languages of the commemoration.[34]

The Palmyrene epigraphy attests also a man who embellished the temple of Bel:[35]

1. *Bu[le et ciui]tas Palmyrenorum Haeranem*
2. *Bo[nnae f(ilium)] qui et Rabbelum*

28 Gawlikowski 1973, 67–68; Will 1971, 262.

29 IGLS 17/1.38. See also PAT 1349. This and the IGLS 17/1.37 date probably on the 1st century CE or the beginning of the 2nd century CE.

30 LSJ v. καθηγητής

31 DNWSI v.sbr

32 See his commentary below the IGLS 17/1.38.

33 The Palmyrene origins of Antiochos are postulated by J.-B. Yon in the commentary to the IGLS 17/1.38.

34 See Fiema 1986. A habit of commemorating a non-Palmyrene by a Tadmorean in his own language is present in one of the inscriptions from Jordanian harrah. See Al-Manaser and Kubiak 2024, 5 inscription no. 4.

35 IGLS 17/1.304.

3. *pium [et phi]lopatrin.*

1. *Ἡ [βουλ]ὴ καὶ ὁ [δῆμος] Ἀρανην Βωννεο[υς]*
2. *[τὸν καὶ P]αββηλο[ν]*
3. *κ[τιστ]ὴν εὐσε[βῆ]*
4. *καὶ [φιλ]όπατριν τειμῆς χάριν*
5. *[ἔ]τους επτ′ μηνὸς Ξανδικοῦ.*

1. *bwl' wdms lḥ[y]rn br bwn[' dy]*
2. *[mtqr' rb'l] mṣbth bbnyny [']l[ḥy'] wrḥym*
3. *mdynth 'qymw lh ṣlm' dnh lyqrh*
4. *byrḥ n[ys]n [šnt] [3]85.*

(Latin) The Bule and the Palmyrene citizens (honor) Hairanes, son of Bonna, who is also called Rabbel, who is pious and loves (his) city. (Greek) City Council and the People (honor) Haranes, son of Bonnes, who is also called Rabbelos, the builder, in pious and loving (his) city in his honour. In the year 385 (74 CE), month Xandikos. (Aramaic) Boule and the People for Hairan, son of Bonna who is also called Rabbel, the one who decorated (i. e. set the statues) in the buildings of gods and who loves his city, made for him the statue in his honour. In the month Nisan, year 385 (74 CE).

The information about his role is only in the Greek and Aramaic part, but the Greek part is reconstructed. The Latin part does not contain any detailed information about honored person. The IGLS provides the scholarly debate on the reconstruction of the Greek line 3: while J.-B. Yon eventually opts for *κτίστης* translatable as constructor, builder, discarding previous reconstruction of the word as *κοσμητής*. The latter would be much better corresponding to the Aramaic variant. The Semitic text uses the term *mṣbth* which derives from the Aramaic verb *ṣbt-* to decorarte.[36] M. Gawlikowski suggested that Hairan was a chief of sculptors and was responsible for the iconographic program of the temple.[37] Hairan could have decorated the monumental sanctuary of Bel.

When it concerns the sculptors in Palmyra, the epigraphic material is not so abundant. We find a sculptor who made a relief depicting the deities Arsu and Azizu.[38] Below the regular dedication commissioned by a ritual operator (*'pkl)* is a remembrance of the sculptor: *dkyr yrḥy glwp'* - Remembered be Yarhai, the sculptor.

The inscription PAT 1719b) from Khirbet es-Sana, one of the villages of the North-West Palmyrena,[39] agricultural and pastoral territory located outside of the city, indicates that the sculptors were also responsible of making the altars:

1. *[d]kyr [_ _ _]*
2. *dy glp ʿlt'*

36 DNWSI v. *mṣb'*.
37 Gawlikowski 1973, 71.
38 PAT 0320, dated on 113 CE.
39 For the Palmyrena see recently Meyer 2017.

3. *lwdʾ dy*
4. *yrḥybwl.*

Remembered be _ _ _ who sculpted altar in praise of Yarhibol.
The name of this artisan was not preserved.

Palmyrene evidence bring also a mention of builders (*bny)* on a small token made of bronze.[40] On the other side of this object is depicted a mask. In the light of recent research on these items, it is possible to understand them as a sort of a tool of administration and economy.[41] It could have been a token received for the service and belonging to a guild. However, these are only speculations, because we do not have any information about the finding spot of this piece and no further information about the builders in Palmyra.

3 Wadi Ramm

Wadi Ramm, located in the Southern Jordan, was an important place on the trade route to the Red Sea and further south. It housed the temple of the goddess Allat and open sanctuary in a spring called Ain esh-Shallalah. From the area of the sanctuary and from the open-air worship place located in the neighbourhood one finds many epigraphic attestations, where the most are written in the Nabataean Aramaic.[42] They are written on the long rock between the spring Ain esh-Shallalah and the temple of Allat. Some of these texts, as it is shown in the Table 1, are providing with the names of different craftsman: sculptors, masons and plasterers.[43] Most of the inscriptions have a character of a remembrance prayer by the craftsman to the goddess Allat. The case of the temple of Allat in Wadi Ramm is the only sacred place (beyond tombs) attesting numerous craftsmen in the service of the deity in the Nabataean context.

Tab.1 Inscriptions from Wadi Ramm mentioning craftsmen (by A. Kubiak-Schneider).[44]

ID	Type	Language	Context	Place of discovery	Text of the inscription	Translation
Savignac 1933, 4	dedication, graffito	Nabatean Aramaic	Rocky wall	Wadi Ramm	dʾ ʾlʿzʾ wmr bytʾ/ dy ʿbd ʿqbr pḥm whgy ʾmnyʾ	This is Al-Uzza and the Lord of the Temple, which made 'Aqbar Peham and Haggai, the craftsmen"

40 RTP 522.
41 See Kubiak-Schneider 2022, 85–86.
42 For the temple of Allat in Wadi Ramm see: Savignac 1932; Tholbecq 1998; Zayadine and Fares-Drapeau 1998; Rieger 2017 and Kubiak-Schneider 2023.
43 Savignac 1933, 415–421, nrs 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14.
44 Inscriptional data gathered during the Polonez Bis1 project Al-At. People of the Gods. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15165818 (accessed on 7.04.2025).

ID	Type	Language	Context	Place of discovery	Text of the inscription	Translation
Savignac 1933, 5	commemoration, graffito	Nabatean Aramaic	Rocky wall (next to no 4)	Wadi Ramm	dkyr ʾyšw/ [w]whbʾl-hy pslyʾ/ ʿlymʾ mrʾnʾ/ wʿbdʾlgʾ wtymw/ šydʾ mn q[dm] ʾltw/ bṭb	May remembered be Aishu and Wahbalahi the sculptors, the servants of our lord, and Abdalga and Taimu the plasterers in front of Allatu, in good.
Savignac 1933, 6	commemoration, graffito	Nabatean Aramaic	Rocky wall (to the left from 5)	Wadi Ramm	šlm ʾdrmw bnʾ	Peace! Adramu, the builder.
Savignac 1933, 7	commemoration, graffito	Nabatean Aramaic	Rocky wall (to the left from 6), in the tabula ansata	Wadi Ramm	dkrt ʾlt ʿydw/ bnyʾ br ʾbšlm bṭb	May Allat remember Aidu, the builder, son of Abshalom. In good.
Savignac 1933, 8	commemoration, graffito	Nabatean Aramaic	Rocky wall (to the left from 7)	Wadi Ramm	dkrt ʾlt ʿbdʾ[lh]y/ br qymt bnyʾ dy/ mn .... Bṭb	May Allat remember Abdallahi, son of Qimat, the builder who is .... In good.
Savignac 1933, 13	commemoration, graffito	Nabatean Aramaic	Rocky wall (towards to North-East, 2 m over the ground	Wadi Ramm	dkrt ʾlt wbr bnyʾ/ br gdn wtʾmw wgdrn ʾḫwhw bṭb	May Allat remember Waber, the builder, son of Gadan, and Tamu and Gadaran his brothers. In good.
Savignac 1933, 14	commemoration, graffito	Nabatean Aramaic	Rocky wall (below no 13)	Wadi Ramm	dkrt ʾlt ḥnynw bnyʾ/ br ʾšlmw wšlmw [_ _ _]	May Allat remember Honeinu the builder, son of Ashalmu, and Shalmu - - -
IGLS 21/4. 141	commemoration, graffito	Greek and Nabatean Aramaic	Rocky wall	Wadi Ramm	μνησθῇ Ουαβαλας ὁ κ̣α̣[ι]/ Αβδομαν̣[ο]ς Αβδομανου/ τοῦ Αιαλο[υ Φ]αινήσιος ἀ<ρχ>(ιτέκτων). / [dkrt]ʿlt[w w]hbʿlhy dy mtqrʾ ʿbdʿmnw br ʿbdʿmnw [br] ʿylw [br] ʿbdʿbdt br qynw pyny, bnyʿ	Greek: May remembered be Ouabalas who is called also Abdomanos, son of Abdomanos, son of Ailaos Phainesios, master-builder./ Aram.: May Allat remember Wahbalahi, who is called also Abdmanu, son of Abdmanu, son of Ailu, son of Ababdat, son of Qinu PYNY, the builder.

The two sculptors (*psly'*) are praying for commemoration together with plasterers (*šyd'*). They both could have been the authors of the statue of Allāt found in the temple.[45] Aishu and Wahballahi, additionally are labeled "servants of our lord" (*'lym' mr'n'),* relating more probably to the royal house than to a deity. The epigraphic habit within the Nabataean inscriptions indicates that the title "our lord" in connection to the kings and not to the deity, as it is used in the Hatrene inscriptions.[46] Furthermore, this finds a connection to the activity of Nabataean royals at this area and cultic place of Allat. The probably same Wahballahi appears in a graffito in Petra on the way of the sacred High Place as his name is followed by the profession: the craftsmen (*'mn'*).[47] Wahballahi is also attested in Hegra as the builder of the tombs.[48] He also left a graffito in Iram commemorating his daughter Shaoudat.[49] It can be that the builders of the temple came from a different part of the kingdom to erect the sanctuary of the great goddess.

The first inscription in the Table 1 is interesting, being a dedication to Al-Uzza and to the Lord of the Temple within the area consecrated to Allat. That shows no conflict within the polytheistic system and cohabitation of deities.

Terminology

The verbs *bn'* (has built), *qwm* (has set up) and *'bd* (had made) are very common in the North-West Semitic epigraphy, used often as synonyms of "dedicated" and "commissioned". Unless they contain the term describing the profession of a person, they not always designate the physical process of erecting or creating.[50] That is why this paper excludes the inscriptions which contain only these verbs without any mention of the profession.

Presented above rich epigraphic material shows the terminological differentiation concerning the professions within the building guild distinguished also in the modern Aramaic dialects. In this part of the chapter I wanted to comment over the variety of terms used in the description of the professions in the cited before inscriptions.

'rdkl' - Master-builder / architect.

Hatrene Aramaic records the word *'rdkl' (ardīklā)* usually translated as architect, a master-builder, highest specialist in building craftmanship. As the specialists of Semitic languages agree, this term comes in a contracted form from Akkadian: *arad ēkalli*, having such meanings as: servant of the palace (used in period between 1900–1200 BCE) and

45 For the statue see Tholbecq 1998, 244.
46 Healey 2009, 66
47 Schmidt-Colinet 1987, 143.
48 See Fiema 1987, 51–53.
49 Schmidt-Colinet 1983, 95.
50 See Kubiak-Schneider 2021, 50–51.

architect/builder (used from the Neo-Babylonian times, from about 8th c. BCE).[51] It is worth a note that the Akkadian *ēkallu*, palace/temple resounds in the Aramaic term *hykl' (hēklā)* meaning great temple in Aramaic, used particularly in the epigraphic evidence from Palmyra and Hatra, but also attested in that meaning earlier e. g. in the Aramaic documents from Elephantine.[52] The strict connection between temples and palaces is a Mesopotamian habit.[53] These places needed to fulfil certain standards with the construction, size and decoration. They hosted numerous statues, crafted images of the gods showing the art and skills of the cutters. The concentration (11 on 12) of inscriptions mentioning the master-builders within the Great Temenos, the central sacred area within the city of Hatra, is then not surprising. Apart of Hatrene inscriptions, this term is confirmed also in two Aramaic papyri from Elephantine written in the Official (Achaemenid) Aramaic dialect.[54] One of them gives the precision: *'rdkl' zy mlk'* - the master-builder of the king. He was a government officeholder. Later, the term *'rdkl'* is used in the Syriac sources and in Babylonian Talmud.[55] The history of profession in the pre-Hellenistic Near East shows that the *'rdkl'* was not a lowly menial worker.[56] They were engineers, designers and constructors. This Aramaic term resonates with the Greek *architektōn*. It echoes the concept of *arad ēkalli* in the Mesopotamian context in that way that the Akkadian term was related to the stonework to differentiate from carpentry.[57] According to Plato, an architect, *architektōn*, in ancient Greece is not a workman, but someone over the builders, who does not contribute the craftmanship but with knowledge.[58] However, the situation in the epigraphic sources looks different from the statement of Plato. Even in the Greek sources it is difficult to trace the difference between the responsibilities and tasks of an *architektōn* and of a *ktistēs*. These two terms seem to be interchangeable.

Bny – Builder

The general designation for a builder in Aramaic is *bny (bannāy)* in different dialectal variants: Hatrene *bn'* and Nabataean *bny'*. It derives from the verb *bny* which is characteristic for many North-West Semitic languages.[59] It is widely used in the Aramaic dialects, e. g. Syriac, Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic.[60] There was no clear distinction between the architect and builder as shows the Graeco-Nabataean

51 Kleber 2018, 441. For the discussion on the term cf. Oppenheim 1949. See also DNWSI v.*'rdkl.*
52 DNWSI v.hykl
53 Sallaberger 2007, 265.
54 Cowley 1923, 14 and 15.
55 Cf. examples cited in Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon, https://cal.huc.edu (accessed 20.03.2025).
56 Kleber 2018, 441. See also MacEwan 1981, 50.
57 Kleber 2018, 441; MacEwan 1981, 50–51.
58 Clarke 1963, 9.
59 DNWSI v. bny$_1$
60 See examples mentioned in CAL: https://cal.huc.edu (accessed on 21.03.2025).

text from Wadi Ramm where the Greek term *architektōn* is rendered in Aramaic by *bny'*.[61] It is noteworthy that the Akkadian term *bānû* means the housebuilder.[62]

Glp and psly - Sculptor

In the Aramaic inscriptions quoted above, the profession of a sculptor is designated by two terms: *glp (gallāp̄)*, attested in Hatra and Palmyra, and *psly*, confirmed in the Nabataean sources.

The term *glp*, with spelling variant *glwp*, reminds the Greek *glyphō* – to carve, sculpt and cut in stone, but it does not necessarily have to be a loanword from that language.[63] It is frequent in the Hatrene inscriptions, and it is attested in Palmyra. The verb *glp* is attested in the Old and Official Aramaic texts.[64]

The Nabataean texts use the word *psl' (passāla)* for the sculptors. This term derives from the verb *psl* attested already in the Old Aramaic sources and in the Achaemenid period. It is a general term describing stone cutting works. It appears in Syriac and Late Jewish Aramaic literature.[65] The noun *psl'* is sometimes translated as mason.[66]

ʾmn – Craftsman, artisan.

The Nabataean inscriptions in the temple in Wadi Ramm contain also a word *ʾmn (ʾummān)* in use to determine a craftsman. It is another term, beside *bny*, which is common for Aramaic, confirmed in the Official Aramaic (Achaemenid) texts as well as in the inscriptions.[67] It is rather a general term meaning specialist. It is attested in the Palmyrene and in the Nabataean inscriptions from Si'. In Palmyra it appears on the busts in the funerary context.[68] In Si' this term labels the artisans who made the honorary statues set in the great temple of Baalshamin.[69] It derives from Akkadian *ummânu*, specialist, scholar, craftsman.[70] In the Neo-Assyrian times (912–612 BCE) this word was a generic term designating an expert, skilled worker.[71] There were different crafts among *ummânus:* carpenters, goldsmiths, metal-workers and stonecutters.[72] They are mentioned in the reference to the monumental (re-)construction projects, e.g. of Es-

61 IGLS 21/4. 141 (see above)
62 Chicago Assyrian Dictionary v. *bānû B.*
63 DNWSI v.glp. S. Brock questions the Greek origins of this root in Aramaic stating that the direct borrowings from Greek are very rare in this Semitic language. See Brock 2005, 11 n.4.
64 See CAL https://cal.huc.edu (accessed on 7.04.2025).
65 CAL: https://cal.huc.edu (accessed on 21.03.2025).
66 Healey 2009, 77. For psly in the Nabatean epigraphy see also Fiema 1987, 51.
67 DNWSI v. $ʾmn_2$ and CAL: https://cal.huc.edu (accessed on 21.03.2025).
68 PAT 0005, 0614 and 0617.
69 See Mazzilli 2018, 190–191.
70 Chicago Assyrian Dictionnary v.ummânu. See also Verderame 2014, 713.
71 Groß 2018, 371.
72 Groß 2018, 371–372.

arhaddon, Sargon II, Assurbanipal, as well to the crafting the divine representations. They were acting on king's order. M. Groß considers that these craftsmen (*ummânu*) had a particular social status in Assyria.[73]

Šyd – plasterer

The textual evidence from Wadi Ramm yielded the term *šyd* (*šēd*) for plasterer. In the same form (*šyd)* it is attested in the Biblical Hebrew, but Aramaic uses rather the spelling *syd*. In such a manner it is in the Syriac and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic texts. Together with the sculptors and builders the plasterers contributed to the construction of the temple of Allat. The Nabataean inscriptions are the only epigraphic attestation of these craftsmen from the studied period.

The terms related to the professions are relatively rare in the epigraphic occurrences. It concerns all the offices and functions, not only related to the constructors' guild or artisans.

Role and status of builders, decorators and sculptors in the East (1st c. BCE – 3rd c. CE)

The indication of professions in the epigraphic sources can be taken as a testimony of a distinctive position of the people mentioned in the inscriptions. It might be particularly connected to the contractors of the sanctuaries and of royal houses who were responsible for building new sanctuaries as the Hatrene, Palmyrene and Nabataean cases present.

The Hatrene examples show that the professions of sculptors and master-builders were coherent. Analyzing the evidence of Hatra we can conclude that the family business of stone works was built on the hierarchy: father was a chief-builder, or an architect and his sons were sculptors until, probably certain age when they could be masters in this domain. They worked on the buildings on the one hand, and on the sculptures and reliefs on the other hand. It reminds the great Renaissance creators: Michaelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci or the architects in the Ottoman Empire under Suleiman the Magnificent. This observation finds its reflection in a Greek inscription from Damlıca situated on the banks of Euphrates, carved on the rock:

1. *Βασιλεύοντος μεγάλου Μιθραδάτου φιλορωμ̣α̣ [ίου]*
2. *[καὶ φιλ]ο̣πάτορος τοῦ ἐγ βασιλέως μεγάλ[ο]υ*
3. *[Ἀντιόχο]υ̣ Ἐ̣π̣ιφανοῦς φιλο[ρ]ωμ̣αίου ἔ[τ]ο̣[υ]ς [---]*
4. *μη[ν]ὸ[ς ? Αὐδν]α[ίο]υ̣· Ἀριαράμνης Π̣α̣λ̣λαιου ̣ἀρχιτέ̣-*
5. *κ[τ]ω[ν] [· · ? · ·]τ̣ε̣ ̣ἐπὶ τῶν τ̣εχνι̣τῶν καὶ δια[κόνων · ·]*
6. *[· · ? · · π]αρὰ [τοῦ] πατρὸς ἐν τούτωι τῶι*
7. *ί[ερῶι ? ἀγάλματ]ά τινα ἀτ̣ε̣λ̣είωτα, ἃ καταστήσας ν*
8. *[· · ? · · ἀνέ]στησεν Δία τὸν Σωτῆρα*

73 Groß 2018, 374.

9. *κ̣[αὶ] [· · ?· ·]υμενον τὸν προγε-*
10. *[. .]Α[· · ?· ·] [ἀνέστ]ησεν δὲ ἐν τῇι προσ-*
11. *βάσ̣[ει] [· · ?· ·] φυλάσσοντα καὶ μετὰ*
12. *[· · ?· ·]ΟΔΙΔΟΝΤΑΙC [. .]αιν̣[. .]ου Ἀριαράμνου*[74]

Under the reign of the great king Mithridates friend of the Romans and loving his father son of the great Antiochus Epiphanes friend the Romans, year ? in the month of Audynaios. I Ariaramnes, son of Pallaios, the master-builder [.....]over the artisans and the servants .... Next to the father in this temple, many unfinished statues (which I finished), in the same time I set up the statues for Zeus the Savior and ... who surmises that Ariaramnes had erected the guardians of the temple....

The royal master-builder called Ariaramnes was responsible for the statues under the reign of Mithridates II (36–20 BCE). As the inscription provides, he finished many statues that he obtained from his father as well as made by himself a statue of Zeus Soter in the sanctuary. He worked as a superior over the other artisans.[75] These cases from Hatra and Commagene learn about a sort of a *cursus* of a master builder in the East, a function passed within a family workshop.

It is a popular trend in the scholarship to consider the craftsmen as non-elite members, most probably by application the medieval and modern era standpoint where the working class was not considered as privileged social group. However, building a temple for the deities and providing decoration to it was a lucrative task. The master-builders and sculptors must have belonged to the elites, especially when we take into consideration the Nabataean and Commagenean architects who were directly subordinated to kings. In similar way, in the pre-Hellenistic Assyria where the kings were gathering the most skilled artisans for their projects of building the palaces and reconstructing the temples.[76] Furthermore, the production of a cult image and of other images of the deities was carefully guided by the ritual specialists, e.g. as in case of Babylonia-incantation priests who supervised the proper rites of purification and image making. Preparation of the decoration for the gods had to be of the highest quality.[77] A trained artisan (*ummânu*) was capable of sourcing and refining materials.[78] The work on the ancient sanctuary was not a random assignment. The two master-builders-sculptors from Hatra informed that they obtained instructions from the god through a divination method. This attestation throws indirectly the light on the existence of some building rituals. They are better known from the 1st millennium BCE religious literature from Mesopotamia. They confirm the participation of the diviners and exorcists.[79] It is possible that the omen seen in the dream was acquired

74 SEG 41–1501; Sahin 1991, 101–103; Hellman 1994, 157. Translation by A. Kubiak-Schneider.
75 For the statues and the sanctuary of Damlıca see Blömer 2012, 110.
76 See Groß 2018.
77 Borrelli, Escobar 2022, 45; Ambos 2010, 222.
78 Borrelli, Escobar 2022, 30.
79 Ambos 2010, 236.

through the intermediation of such a cultic specialist, who also interpreted the sign. Furthermore, as it was shown through Palmyrene and Hatrene testimonies, the builders and sculptors belonged to the temple workshop or a guild under a special divine protection. The constructing tools were also considered as a property of the gods, a sacred deposit in the temple.

The commemorative annotations to the inscriptions with the names of sculptors or of builders, are the material testimony of what was for the ancients making an inscription and eternalizing the name in the stone. The Hatrene inscriptions: H106, 232 f) and 336 a) point out the literacy of the sculptors and builders who could be also responsible for carving a text in stone. The ones who had learned craft of dealing with stones (cutting, building, carving) could have been the authors of the inscriptions.

Conclusion

Although the epigraphic material concerning building the temples of the gods is not very rich, the inscriptions bring light on the people who constructed the monumental places of worship. This paper focused on the selected evidence from Hatra, Palmyra and Wadi Ramm and the inscriptions with the direct indication of a profession related to building and providing decorations to the deities. It wanted to give the place and word to the mentioned members of communities who were serving the gods by their construction and artistic skills. This paper brought six different terms in relation to the crafts within the sacred context. It revealed that being master builder was a lucrative task, producing not only the structures, but also crafting the images of the gods. Although this study gave more of an overview, rather than going very deep into the specifics what results from the state of the written sources from the period of 1st c. BCE – 3rd c. CE, we can find some patterns like, e. g. the role of family business in constructing the sanctuaries. The role of a family in this business is crucial – the sources clearly indicate the family ties, where the members are acting within one profession or one workshop. Furthermore, it emerges from the data the grouping of the skilled experts in the royal and in the temple guilds. The builders and sculptors mentioned in the epigraphic material as the people working on the cultic places were representants of higher stratum of the societies.

The works of the master builders and sculptors and the notions of belonging to a guild and to the deities (Bel in Palmyra, Barmarin in Hatra) let think that the craftsmen might have had a deeper knowledge about the meaning of symbols in the religious context, a know-how in building for the gods. Either they acted under guidance of the priests like in Mesopotamia or they were involved somehow in the cultic temple life as well. For this reason, the information about the oracular activity as a communication form in the Hatrene inscription is precious. It presents the entanglement of construction works with a particular religious act. Working on a temple required collaboration

with the divine through the ritual specialists.[80] The temple perceived as a divine house needed an approval from its resident.[81]

Studying the remains and paying more attention on the names and the people's professions helps us understanding the past from the human aspect and processes of creation of the places of worship. This kind of examination brings us nearer to understand the social history of religions and creation of cultic spaces.

Abbreviations

DNWSI:	J. Hoftijzer, K. Jongeling, Dictionary of North-West Semitic Inscriptions, Leiden, 1995.
De arch. -	Vitruvius, De architectura, eds. I.D. Rowland, Th. Noble Howe, 2001.
IGLS:	*Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie*, vols I – XXI.
PAT:	Eleonora Cussini, Delbert R. Hillers, *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*, Baltimore/London, 1996.
RTP:	H. Ingholt, H. Seyrig, J. Starcky, A. Caquot, Recueil des Tessères de Palmyre, Paris, 1955.
SEG:	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*.

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80 For dependence and networks of the craftsmen and the clergy see the paper of C.-L. Raschel within this volume.

81 Baker 2016, 54.

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Prophetes, prophetis and the epigraphic culture of Miletos[1]

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Didyma and its officials

Didyma, often called Branchidai in ancient literary sources, situated 16.5 km to the south of Miletos or some 19–20 km along the Sacred Way,[2] was a town housing one of the most important and longest-lasting Greek temples and Oracles.[3] The Oracle stopped operating once its guardians, the Branchidai, were expelled or evacuated to Central Asia in 479 BCE on orders of Xerxes.[4] Its history began anew in 331 BCE and throughout the Hellenistic and Roman times Didyma gained an enormous reputation as an infallible Oracle,[5] together with Delphi and Klaros belonging to "'the big three' of Apollonian prophecy".[6] Under Empire it enjoyed coveted privileges: a large asylum area and the right to be named a beneficiary in testaments which it shared with only eight more temples throughout the Roman Empire.[7]

Inscriptions attest several categories of officials associated with the principal temples of Didyma, devoted to Apollo and his twin sister Artemis, and with the Oracle: *prophetes*, *prophetis*, *tamias*, *hydrophoros*, *hypochrestes*, *grammateus* (secretary), *paraphylax* (temple guard) and lesser personnel known from our sources as "all those around the Oracle".[8] Due to the nature of evidence we know rather names of these officials than the area of

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2 Tuchelt 1992, 38.

3 Paus. VII 5.4; D.Chr. 40.8–9. About the town see Nawotka 2023, 187–188. Here I follow Fontenrose 1988 spelling 'Oracle' for an oracular establishment and 'oracle' for an oracular response.

4 Nawotka 2026.

5 So in an epigram commissioned in the 3rd c. by the people of Rhodes (*Didyma* 83, ll. 6–7): θέσπισεν ἀψεύστων/ πολλάκις ἐκ τριπόδων.

6 Lucian frequently lists these three Oracles in one phrase, e.g. *Alex.* 29, 43, *DDeor.* 18.1. In general, see Stoneman 2011, 84–100; Nissinen 2017, 224, 307. On the similarly high position of Klaros and in Didyma under Empire see Lampinen 2013.

7 Ulpianus *FIRA* II² 285.22.6. Nawotka 2023, 117.

8 Busine 2006, 182; Nawotka 2023, 203. The quote is from Didyma 395, ll. 5–6: [οἱ]/ περὶ τὸ μαντεῖον πάντες.

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their responsibility. Epigraphic evidence leaves no doubt that *tamiai* were indeed involved in running the temple's treasury,[9] *hypochrestes* is generally recognized as an aide to prophetes in charge of recording oracles.[10] These officials are less frequently attested than *prophetai* and *hydrophoroi*. *Hydrophoroi* were young girls from elite Milesian families, often daughters of *prophetai*, known from over a hundred inscriptions.[11] Their title implies carrying water for some cult purpose but the evidence does not allow us to go any further.[12] This paper will deal with prophets and prophetesses, whose titles seems to denote their involvement with the Oracle if not outright participation in its mantic activity. Its focus will be more on the social position of the office holders, much less on actual prophesizing at Didyma. This stems from the nature of our sources apparently not interested in recording details of the principal activity of the famous Oracle.

Prophetes

Inscriptions, our principal evidence for institutions of social life in the Greek world, attest *prophetai* in all major areas of the Eastern Mediterranean, although the great majority of attestations comes from Asia Minor. PHI Greek Inscriptions database lists 655 matches in 518 texts for προφητ search, in that 548 matches in 421 texts from Asia Minor. Within 518 texts 48 come from Egypt, where the Greek word προφήτης was used to denote Egyptian priests of various ranks.[13] When 48 pieces of evidence for non-Greek prophets are deducted from the total number of texts, the domination of evidence from Asia Minor is even more apparent. The evidence is not spread evenly throughout Asia Minor but concentrated overwhelmingly in just two places: Didyma and Miletos with 285 texts and Klaros with 94 texts.[14] Other evidence comes mostly from western Asia Minor: Lykia, Bithynia, Mysia etc. These are rough figures on account of dublets occasionally appearing in the PHI Greek Inscriptions database and absence of major recent corpora and newer issues of the SEG in this database,[15] but the overall image transmitted by our sources is very clear: *prophetes* was an office typical of the two great Oracles of Western Asia Minor, Didyma and Klaros. Surely it was not a phenomenon characteristic of all Greek Oracles, even if isolated attestations of it come from other oracular establishments, i.e. from Apollo's sanctuary in Ptoion.[16] The meager attestation of *prophetai* outside of Klaros and Didyma/Miletos speaks both to the purely local character of some other Oracles and to the undistinguished social role of *prophetai* outside of western Asia Minor. The exceptional abundance of data pertaining to *prophetai* of Didyma makes these data an important tool

9 E.g. *Didyma* 446, ll. 1–2: ταμιευ/[όντων τῶ]ν ἱερῶν χρημάτων. Fontenrose 1988, 55–59.
10 Fontenrose 1988, 59–60.00
11 Van Bremen 1996, 90–95, 324–327; Busine 2006, 293.
12 Nawotka 2023, 203–204. For the list of known *hydrophoroi* see Marcellesi 2005.
13 Trismegistos database shows 211 matches for προφητ search.
14 Outside of PHI Greek Inscriptions numerous attestations of prophetes of Klaros can be found in Ferrary 2014 and in *Didyma* III.7.
15 Ferrary 2014.
16 *IG* VII 4135, 4138, 4142, 4147.

to study the social history of the polis of the Milesians. *Prophetai* are among the best attested officials of Miletos: the catalogue at the end this chapter lists 223 of them. In addition, 53 inscriptions mention *prophetai* whose names were either never inscribed or did not survive.[17] Finally, an unnamed prophetes was tortured and executed under Constantine and Licinius.[18]

There is the presumption that the office of *prophetes* was introduced in Didyma in the moment when the Oracle started anew its activity in the early spring of 331 BCE, issuing the oracle for Alexander the Great, son of Zeus.[19] The last datable *prophetes* was Emperor Julian which gives almost seven hundred years of unbroken activity of the temple and Oracle of Apollo Didymeus.[20] *Prophetes* was selected by lot for an annual term of office,[21] hence 223 *prophetai* attested over almost seven hundred years means that we know ca. 1/3 of all office holders – a very high proportion indeed by standards of ancient history. Higher proportions of known office holders to the total number of them anywhere in the ancient world appear only when we have an ancient list of office holders: Athenian archons transmitted by Diodoros or Milesian eponymous *stephanephoroi* known from seven lists surviving in stone for the period 525/4 BCE until Tiberius, with some lacunae.[22]

We know *prophetai* from a variety of epigraphic evidence: *tituli honorarii*, Didyma inventories, building accounts, decrees, *topoi* in the stadium in Didyma, *hydrophoros* and *tamiai* inscriptions, and, principally, from *prophetes* inscriptions. These were commemorative documents, very important in the Milesian epigraphic culture, commissioned by *prophetai* at the end of their career and inscribed, sometimes decorated with crowns, on walls of the so-called *Prophetenhaus* whose exact location is not known.[23] The evidence of this kind brings information on the office-holders, their career and family connections,[24] rarely telling us anything about what *prophetai* were actually doing. As we learn from the treaty between Miletos and Magnesia of the late 180s BCE, the *prophetes* supervised the cult, sacrifices, and rites at Didyma.[25] A treaty with Seleukeia-Tralleis of 212/1 BCE show the *prophetes* sacrificing and leading a procession to assure Apollo's blessing for the treaty.[26]

17 *Didyma* 26 AB, 29, 40+41, 45, 54, 179, 199, 202I, 202II, 202III, 203, 214AIIIa, 214IV, 214C, 214AV, 227aIII, 227bI, 227III, 230, 232B, 288, 290, 296, 317, 319, 364, 377, 389, 391, 399, 400, 411, 454, 459, 460, 476, 490, 587 (as ὑποφήτης), 674II, 678, 681, 682, 688a, 692, 693, 696, 697, 698, 700, 710, 713; *Milet* 1151, 1174.

18 Eus. *PE* IV 2. Nawotka 2023, 149.

19 Callisth. *BNJ* 124 F14a, ap. Str. XVII 1.43. Fontenrose 1988, 181 ("Catalogue of Didymaean Responses", Historical Responses 4).

20 Iul. *Ep.* 88.

21 Nawotka 2014, 140–141.

22 Milet 122–128.

23 Günther 2003; Lampinen 2013, 69–70; Nawotka 2020, 118–126.

24 Günther 2003, 448 gives an impressive example of the pedigree chart of a family which, over eight generations, produced a large number of *prophetai* and *stephanephoroi* in the period between the mid-3rd c. BCE and the early 1st c. CE.

25 *Milet* 150, ll. 19–22. Fontenrose 1988, 51–52, 187–189; Busine 2006, 283, Nawotka 2023, 89–90.

26 *Milet* 143A, ll. 39–42. Similar: *Milet* 36a-c+36aa (a decree on new citizens), 37 (an international treaty), 144 (*isopoliteia*), 146 (*isopoliteia*). Nawotka 2023, 205.

A late-I[st] c. decree reinstates a duty of *prophetai* and *stephanephoroi* to host at meals the members of the venerable associations of Molpoi and Kosmoi.[27] Building accounts and inventories, often listing a *prophetes* right after the stephanephoric date, show him as the top official of Didyma.[28] To the best of my knowledge the only direct epigraphic evidence of a *prophetes* (ὑποφήτης τοῦ θ[εοῦ] in this document)[29] in charge of managing an Oracle comes from Klaros: περὶ τοῦ χρηστηρίου φήμ[ηι - - - τὴν]/ προστασίαν.[30] What is never revealed by our sources is actual prophesizing or even the participation of *prophetai* in the process of acquiring an oracular response. The single case a Didymaen *prophetes* is named in an inscription quoting an oracle is Agathon who did ask Apollo a question concerning cult of Horai.[31] There was a fundamental difference between two most important Oracles in Asia Minor: in Klaros *prophetai* did prophesize,[32] in Didyma they did not.

No information is available on life, career or family connections of 78 out of 226 *prophetai* known by name, sometimes due to the damage to inscriptions, sometimes due to their nature – e.g. building accounts and inventories recorded only the names of *prophetai*, not being interested in their career or family members. But still we know a lot about family ties and further, mostly earlier, career of 148 *prophetai*, or almost 2/3 of the whole lot. Within this group 50 were related to other *prophetai*, 84 to *hydrophoroi* and *tamiai* of Didyma and/or to *stephanephoroi*, 21 had other notables among their family members. 52 *prophetai* are recorded as having served as *stephanephoroi* and 61 are known to have performed other public office. Seven *prophetai* are recorded as Asiarchs or *archiereis*, or priests of Imperial cult in Miletos or Ionia,[33] nine more were related to Asiarchs or *archiereis*.[34] Then is the *boularchos*, the ceremonial president of the boule, attested in the province of Asia in the Imperial age.[35] Among 14 attested office-holders in Miletos at least half attained the rank of *prophetes* too.[36] In many cases we learn of the career of a *prophetes* from one inscription only and we may be quite sure that in many cases his *cursus honorum* progressed further after this single piece of evidence was committed to stone. However limited our source-basis is, a very high coincidence between *prophetai* and *stephanephoroi*, the top officials of Miletos, and close family ties between various *prophetai* and *stephanephoroi* are telling. Under the Antonines, in the age of its top prosperity Miletos was the polis of

27 *Milet* 134. Lampinen 2013, 74–75; Nawotka 2023, 122–123.

28 Nawotka 2023, 204.

29 In literary sources (Apollonius Rhodius, Lucian, Maximus of Tyre) the poetic word ὑποφήτης is an equivalent of *prophetes*: see discussion of its usage in: Fascher 1927, 16–17, 27–32; Lampinen 2013, 63. In the case of this inscription: Robert 1992, 283–287.

30 *SEG* 42.1065, ll. 11–12; partly restored in ll. 7–8: κατακεκλημένος ἐπὶ τὴ[ν προστασίαν]/ τοῦ μαντείου, l. 31: τὸν ὑποφήτην τοῦ θ[εοῦ]. The date: first half of the 2[nd] c. BCE.

31 *Didyma* 748 of the 3[rd] c. CE.

32 Tac. *An*. II 54; Iambl. *myst.* 3.11. Robert 1992, 286–288; Lampinen 2013, 64.

33 Nos 117, 124, 140, 143, 164, 189, 203 in the catalogue.

34 Nos. 72, 133, 146, 150, 162, 189, 190, 196, 197 in the catalogue.

35 Nawotka 2000.

36 Nos. 133, 162, 163, 164, 167, 184, 192 in the catalogue. If Rehm's restoration in Didyma 364, l. 4 πρ[οφήτου?] holds, this would be the eighth *boularachos* among the Milesian *prophetai*.

no more than 100,000 inhabitants, free and unfree,[37] whose broad elite of *honorati* or people staffing the council and all offices, was derived from a few dozen families, no more. A handful of them formed the real elite: people who chose to perform the costly offices associated with organizing and paying for processions and accompanying hecatombs, like *stephanephoroi*, and for public entertainment, the most expensive being gladiatorial games staged by priests (*archiereis*) of Imperial cult, and for leading embassies to Rome. Some *prophetai* received additional praise for volunteering for offices (αὐτεπάνγελτος) or accepting its burden without the allotment procedure (ἀκληρωτεί/ ἀκλήρωτος), instead of going through the usual selection procedure with obvious pressure from the people on the rich.[38] Although state funds were available for performing duties prescribed for prophetes, we learn of three office-holders praised for paying for everything from their pocket (δωρεάν).[39] The statistics listed above show *prophetai* firmly within this narrow circle of Milesian high elite of *stephanephoroi*, ambassadors and priests of Imperial cult. Since we hear of *prophetai* as old as 81,[40] one can get the impression that sometimes at least this office was crowning the career of Milesian notables.

Finally, nothing speaks more to the prestige of the office of *prophetes* in the wider world than the fact that three Roman Emperors assumed it: Trajan in 97–102,[41] Hadrian in 137/8,[42] and Julian in 361–363.[43] We can surmise that for Julian it was an act of somewhat archaizing nature aimed at propping up a major pagan cult center, recently condemned to silence by a Christian Emperor and now brought back to life.[44] But the gestures of Trajan and Hadrian simply demonstrate their interest in and appreciation of the Oracle of Didyma, the gestures even more remarkable in the light of our knowledge of how selective Emperors were with regard to assuming municipal offices.[45] Among *prophetai* of Didyma were also true Milesian aristocrats, descendents of founders of the city and of major heroes of Greek mythology,[46] members of the broad Imperial elite: two equites,[47] and local grandees who boasted equites and senators within their family.[48]

Graph 1 shows that attestations of *prophetai* are not spread evenly throughout the period from the 4th c. BCE until the 4th c. CE. The first known prophetes was Eirenias s. of

37 Nawotka 2023, 165–166.

38 *Didyma* 269, 277, 687, 689 (αὐτεπάνγελτος) and *Didyma* 236BIII, 279, 286, 288, 714a (ἀκληρωτεί/ ἀκλήρωτος). Nawotka 2014, 140–141.

39 *Didyma* 237, 682, 688a. Günther, Didyma III.7, 66 (ad 682).

40 *Didyma* 268.

41 *Didyma* 318, 407. Günther 2017, 589.

42 *Didyma* 494.

43 Jul. *Ep.* 88.

44 Sozom. *Hist. Eccl.* V 20.7. Nawotka 2023, 149.

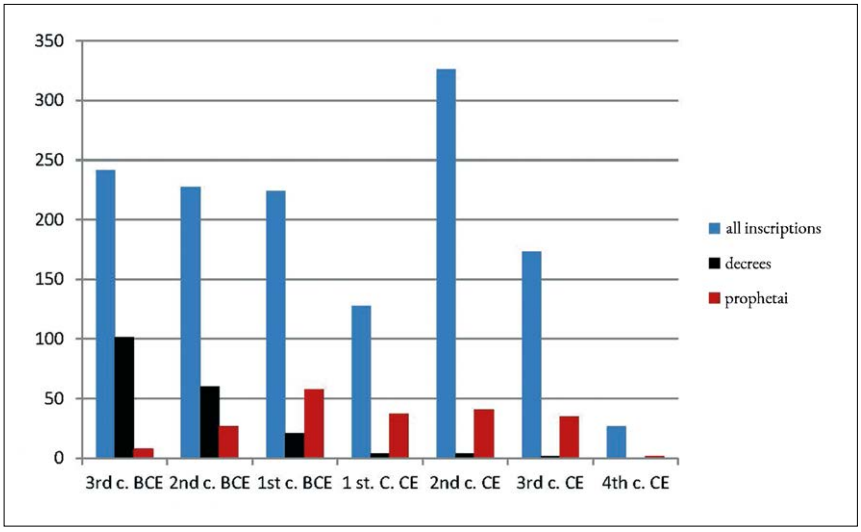
45 Sherk 1993, 285–286.

46 Nos 148, 150, 212 in the catalogue. See Nawotka 2023, 177–179 on the elite within the Milesian elite distinguished by credible claims on eminent ancestry.

47 No 117, 170 in the catalogue.

48 Nos 103, 115, 146, 196, 197 in the catalogue.

49 Figures for the chronological distribution of all inscriptions and decrees in Miletos are based on Nawotka 2020.



Graph 1: attestations of *prophetai* and Milesian decrees against the background of all inscriptions of Miletos[49].

Hekataios, who served before, but not much before, 238/7 BCE,[50] almost a hundred years after the Oracle reopened. We have no knowledge who was in charge of it from 331 BCE until 238 BCE and if indeed it was a *prophetes*, why no office holder was mentioned by our sources for such a long time. The number of known *prophetai* in the 3rd c. BCE was only eight, to increase rapidly to 25.5 in the 2nd c. BCE and to 57.5 in the 1st c. BCE – the highest per-century number in history of Didyma. The number of attested *prophetai* stayed at more or led equal level of 35–40.5 in the 1st to the 3rd c. CE, although in the 2nd CE these numbers declined in proportion to the overall epigraphic production at Miletos which peaked at 326 in the 2nd c. CE. The number of attested *prophetai* was quite high in the 3rd c. CE (35), especially when juxtaposed with the fast declining epigraphic output in this age with only 173 inscriptions. Remarkably, *prophetai* are attested in the 4th c. BCE too.[51] Thus the attestation of *prophetai* in later Empire (3rd-4th c. CE) beats the trend of the fast declining epigraphic production in this period. All of these speaks to the lasting importance of *propheteia* and Didyma in general for the self-perception of the Milesian elite in the Imperial age.

A conspicuous feature of the Milesian epigraphic culture of the Hellenistic age is the declining line for decrees, from the high of 101.5 in the 3rd c. BCE (42 % of all inscription in this century) to the low of just 21 in the 1st c. BCE (9.4 %). Inscribing decrees was an universal feature of Hellenistic Greek democracy and the decline in number of decrees

50 *Didyma* 216, 142. Date: Günther 2017, 216.

51 Nos 207, 208 in the Catalogue, perhaps some dated by A. Rehm as 'late Empire' (212–214) and the unnamed prophetes executed under Constantine and Licinius, Eus. *PE* IV 2.

needs to be interpreted as a sign of constitutional change away from the early-Hellenistic democracy.[52] The decline in number of inscribed decrees occurred in Miletos in direct opposition to the increase in attestation of *prophetai* in the same period from eight to 57.5. The steady decline of inscribing of decrees continued in the early-Imperial age with figures like 4 per century in the 1st and 2nd c. CE to just 1.5 in the 3rd c. It marks the trend away from the vigorous democracy at its peak at the end of the 3rd c. BCE to the Hellenistic low in 1st c. BCE, and to its demise under Trajan.[53] The 1st c. BCE was the age of discernible turmoil in Miletos which lost freedom and the right to organize Didymeian games for having sided with Mithridates VI and almost stopped legislating.[54] The peak attestation of *prophetai* in this time points to the veritable shift in public perception of civic leaders, if not to the incipient constitutional change in Miletos. *Prophetai*, more than half of those serving in this age known by name, and 24.5 of them assuming also the office of *stephanephoros* started to demonstrate openly their leadership position in Miletos, as if foretelling the shift in constitution from weakened democracy to the regime of *honorati* under Early Empire.

Prophetis

In classical Plato's rendition a *prophetis* in Delphi was an inspired seer,[55] in modern view assisted by male functionaries who passed to her questions of enquirers and turned her answers into verse.[56] Antti Lampinen gives a neat definition of her position: "(s)he belongs to a class of 'dependent diviners' in the sense of being part of a hierarchy in an established oracular shrine".[57] Normally an oracle was issued in response to a question/request; if Apollo pronounced it on his will, it was worthy of taking note in stone.[58] Agatho, wife of a third-century *prophetes* is known to have "assumed the prophetic garment and to utter a prophecy",[59] and this is as close as any Hellenistic or later *prophetes* is attested to participating in prophesizing at Didyma.

Prophetis as a mantic official is known from Imperial-age inscriptions (below) and from accounts of Origenes (ca. 248) and Iamblichos (ca. 300), after Porphyry of Tyre,

52 Nawotka 2021.

53 Nawotka 2014, 182–184.

54 Nawotka 2023, 104–108, 208–209.

55 Pl. *Phdr.* 244a–b: ἥ τε γὰρ δὴ ἐν Δελφοῖς προφῆτις αἵ τ' ἐν Δωδώνῃ ἱέρειαι μανεῖσαι μὲν πολλὰ δὴ καὶ καλὰ ἰδίᾳ τε καὶ δημοσίᾳ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἠργάσαντο, σωφρονοῦσαι δὲ βραχέα ἢ οὐδέν ("the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona when out of their senses have conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and private life, but when in their senses few or none", tr. B. Jowett).

56 Flacellière 1961, 47–52; Parke 1985, 218; Fontenrose 1988, 84–85; Lampinen 2013, passim.

57 Lampinen 2013, 51.

58 *Didyma* 248, l. 7: ᾧ καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐ[π' αὐ]τοματισμῷ ἔ[χρησε] – oracle issued to *prophetes* Ulpius Athenagoras at the end of the 2nd c. Nissinen 2017, 284–285.

59 *Didyma* 302+303, ll. 9–11: οὗ προφητεύοντ[ος ἡ σεμ]νοτάτη σύμβι/ος Ἀγαθὼ τὴν στ[οὰν τῆς προ]φητικῆς ἐστέ/[γ]ασεν καὶ ἔχρεισ[εν].

a 3rd-c. CE author.[60] If they reflect the reality not only of their times but also of earlier ages, after the reopening of the Oracle in 331 BCE, oracular responses were uttered by a *prophetis*. Modern scholars surmise that *prophetis*, a female transmitter of Apollo's oracles, was introduced in Didyma after it reopened following the example of Delphi.[61] There is no direct evidence for that in our sources and the assumption of organizational similarity between the two great Greek Oracles, Delphi and Didyma, is largely based on mythology which links the genealogy of the Branchidai with Delphi and its god.[62] Since we have no certain evidence of a Didymaean *prophetis* earlier than the 1st c. CE, we have no factual knowledge who prophesized at Didyma in the Hellenistic age.

We know a description of the mantic session from Iamblichos: Iamblichos says: "Another species of divine divination which is much celebrated, most manifest and manifold, is that of oracles, about which you say as follows: There are some who drink water, as the priest of Klarios, in Kolophon ...; and others imbibe the vapour from water, as the prophetesses in Brandchidai. ... The prophetic woman too in Brandchidai, whether she holds in her hand a wand, which was at first received from some God, and becomes filled with a divine splendor, or whether seated on an axis, she predicts future events, or dips her feet or the border of her garment in the water, or receives the God by imbibing the vapour of the water; by all these she becomes adapted to partake externally of the God. But the multitude of sacrifices, the sacred law of the whole sanctimony, and such other things as are performed in a divine manner, prior to the prophetic inspiration, viz. the baths of the prophetess, her fasting for three whole days, her retiring into the adyta, and there receiving a divine light, and rejoicing for a considerable time – all these evince that the God is entreated by prayer to approach, that he becomes externally present, and that the prophetess, before she comes to her accustomed place, is inspired in a wonderful manner; and that, in the spirit which rises from the fountain, another more ancient God, who is separate from the place, shines forth to the view, and who is also the cause of the place, of the country, and of the whole divination".[63] Since some elements of it are attested in Imperial-age inscriptions we can be quite sure that indeed this was the way how Oracle operated, at least under Empire.[64]

Prophetis is attested directly in only two inscriptions. The earlier, of the first c. CE, names *prophetis* Tryphosa, either grandmother or great-grandmother of *hydrophoros*

60 Origenes *Cels*. I 70: λελέξεται γὰρ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὅτι χρῆται ὁ πεπιστευμένος παρ' Ἕλλησιν εἶναι θεὸς ὁ Πύθιος καὶ ὁ Διδυμεὺς τοιᾷδε φωνῇ τῇ τῆς Πυθίας ἢ τῆς ἐν Μιλήτῳ γενομένης προφήτιδος, or "he who is believed among the Greeks to be a god, viz., the Pythian and Didymean Apollo, makes use of such a voice for his Pythian priestess at Delphi, and for his prophetess at Miletos", tr. by F. Crombie with a minor change. Iamb. *Myst*. 3.11: ἐν Βραγχίδαις προφήτιδες.

61 Fontenrose 1988, 55–56; Stoneman 2011, 86; Greaves 2012, 182; Nissinen 2017, 227.

62 Call. F 229.7; Str. IX 3.9; Conon, *BNP* 26 F1.33. S. Blakley, *BNJ* 26, commentary to F1.3; Lampinen 2013, 59–62.

63 Iamb. *Myst*. 3.11; tr. by T. Taylor with minor changes.

64 Nawotka 2023, 199.

Platainis.[65] If the first is true, Tryphosa's *propheteia* most likely enrolled in the 1st c. CE, if she was great-grandmother of Platainis, the date for Tryphosa's *propheteia* was surely earlier, perhaps as early as the 1st c. BCE.[66] A much damaged *hydrophoros* inscription of the second half of the second c. CE reads: [τῇ/ προφ]ήτιδι [τοῦ Διδυμέως?/ Κλεο]πάτρᾳ [τῇ θυγατρὶ ../...] Κλαυδ[ίου Διογένους?/ ἀγω]νοθέ[του Διδυμείων?] ("to *prophetis* of (Apollo) Didymeus Kleopatra, daughter of Claudius Diogenes agonothetes of the Didymeia").[67] Another *prophetis* was also Agatho, although her dignity and occupation is described metonymically as: "assumed the prophetic garment and uttered a prophecy".[68] Then there is a graffito which reads: Γάϊς εὐ/χαριστῶ/ τῇ καλῇ/ προφητίσ/κῃ.[69] It is impossible to say whether the *hapax* προφητίσκη was used in this graffito as a term of endearment or ironically, hence whether Gais was a true prophetess or not.[70] Finally a certain Eirene is referred to in her epitaph as πρόμαντις.[71] This word, rare as it is in epigraphic sources, was commonly used by Greek authors, often for mantic functionaries, in Delphi and elsewhere,[72] hence here *promantis* is most likely a metonymy for *prophetis*.[73]

The evidence for prophetesses at Didyma (four to five inscriptions) is strikingly meager as compared both with the number of attested *prophetai* (over 220), *hydrophoroi* of Artemis (119 known from 128 inscriptions),[74] and dozens known oracles.[75] These figures prove that the Milesian elite took care of recording the leading officials, both male and female, of the temples of Apollo and Artemis at Didyma, as well as of the oracular activity performed there. Evidence, scarce as it is, allows for some observation about the prophetesses

65 The relation between Platainis and Tryphosa is stated (*SEG* 30.1286 = *Didyma* 708, ll. 2–4) as: Πλαταινὶς Μέλανος ἡ καλουμένη/ Τρυφῶσα μήμης προφήτιδος/ Τρυφώσης. The exact meaning of the hapax μήμη is unknown, translated either as 'grandmother' (LSJ, s.v) or 'great-grandmother' (Günther 2017, 592; LSJ Suppl., s.v.).

66 *SEG* 30.1286 = *Didyma* 708. Lampinen, 2013, 71. See Günther *Didyma* III.7, 83 (ad 708) on dates. L.-M. Günther 2012 dates it in the beginning of the 1st c. CE.

67 *Didyma* 273. Günther 2017, 379.

68 *Didyma* 302+303, ll. 10–11: τὴν στ[οὰν τῆς προ]φητικῆς ἐστέ/[γ]ασεν καὶ ἔχρεισ[εν].

69 *Didyma* 235B. Undated.

70 The word is unknown to *LSJ* (including Supplement), not listed in popular data bases: PHI Greek Inscriptions, TLG, papyri.info. To Lampinen (2013, 71 n. 169) the graffito is ironic.

71 *Milet* 546 of the Imperial age; date: Günther 2017, 214.

72 E.g. Neophron fr. 1; Paus. III 4.3, X 13.8; Luc. *Herm*. 60; Aristid. Εἰς τὸν Σάραπιν 48; Jul. Εἰς τὴν μητέρα τῶν θεῶν 1.15; *Scholia in Aelium Aristidem* epigr. 11.6. Specifically on prophetesses in Delphi, Didyma and other places: Luc. *Bis.Acc*. 1. Descriptively Max.Tyr. 8.1 of all prophetic diviners: ἡ μὲν πρόμαντις καθίζουσα ἐπὶ τρίποδος, ἐμπιμπλαμένη δαιμονίου πνεύματος, χρησμῳδεῖ. In inscriptions in reference to gods: SEG 45.1929, 63.1549.

73 For identification of *promantis* as *prophetis* see Herrmann ad *Milet* 546; Stoneman 2011, 30; Lampinen 2013, 72–73; Nissinen 2017, 121. On this particular case: Günther 2017, 214.

74 Marcellesi 2005.

75 According to the catalogue of oracular responses, historical and quasi-historical, in Fontenrose 1988, 179–244; when all other cases mentioned by Fontenrose are taken into consideration, the number of oracles is 82. Busine' catalogue (2005, 445–462) attributes 56 responses to Didyma in the Imperial age. *Didyma* III.7 lists two certain (746, 748) and four uncertain fragmentary oracles (750, 751, 752, 753) not included in Fontenrose's list.

of Didyma. All attested prophetesses about whose background and social position we know were members of families of *prophetai*, *hydrophoroi*, *agonothetai*, i.e. they belonged to the Milesian elite.[76] The position of the *prophetis* clearly was attractive to Milesian elite women over a long period, from the first c. CE (BCE?) until the third c. CE. This factor may have contributed to the number of attestation – low in absolute terms but still the highest in the Greek world: outside of Miletos/Didyma there are only ten inscriptions attesting prophetesses.[77]

We do not know why prophetesses were so scarcely attested. The cause of it in Miletos/Didyma was not gender: women and girls appear in hundreds of inscriptions, not infrequently as members of power-networks in Hellenistic and Roman Miletos.[78] As shown before, all known Didymaean prophetesses were elite women, hence it was not the low social ranking either which contributed to their sparse attestation. For lack of better solution, one may think perhaps of some cultural or religious taboo which prevented most people from writing in stone about female mantic officials. Much the same is true in Delphi where we hear of 'the house of Pythia' but do not learn the names of Pythias,[79] while the most common semantic field of the word Πύθια is 'Pythian games'.

The attested familial situation of Didymaean prophetesses (wife, great-grandmother) makes the presumption of modern scholars on the "total chastity" required from a *prophetis* invalid.[80] There is not a shred of evidence of how *prophetis* was regularly appointed or how long she served. The example of Tryphosa selected to *propheteia* by Apollo's oracle was more likely exceptional than the regular way of finding suitable candidates for the dignity of prophetis.[81] The example of Agatho, who "assumed the prophetic garment and uttered a prophecy" in the year when her husband was a *prophetes* might suggest that some prophetesses acted short-term.[82] Surely any person selected for the job must have been known for her ability to receive inspiration from Apollo and to be able to express herself in hexameter but to go any further would be pure speculation. Source data on Didymaean prophetesses, meager as it is, makes us think that a *prophetis* was not a person living in seclusion and acting in trans on everyday basis, but rather a woman who conducted normal upper-class lifestyle, descending into the *antron* of the Oracle perhaps once a month to transmit the words of Apollo, in verse or more commonly in prose.

76 Lampinen 2013, 78.

77 *IG* II^2 13148 (Athens), *IG* VII 3111 (Lebadeia), *IG* XII Suppl. 126 (Lesbos), *IG* XII.3 1349/863 (Thera), *TAM* V.1 535 (Maionia, Lydia), *SEG* 49.1624 (Nisyra, Lydia), *IK Kalchedon* 61 (Kalchedon), Haspels, *Highlands of Phrygia* 338,107, *TAM* III,1 870 (Termessos), *IGLSyr* 1 51 (Kommagene).

78 Günther 2014.

79 E.g. *CID* IV 146: τὴν οἰκίαν/ τῇ Πυθίᾳ κατεσκεύασεν.

80 So Parke 1985, 210, 216 who basis his thesis on mistranslation of Porphyry's (*Myst.* 3.11) description of solemn features surrounding a prophetess in her mantic activity ὁ θεσμὸς τῆς ὅλης ἁγιστείας which Parke understands – for no reason – as "the rule of complete chastity" while in fact it means "law of ritual service" or "the sacred law of the whole sanctimony" (in T. Taylor's rendition).

81 *SEG* 30.1286 = *Didyma* 708, ll. 4–5: ἦν ὁ θεὸς χρησσμῶι/ κατέστησε.

82 *Didyma* 302+303.

From this standpoint one needs to approach Plutarch's words on Delphian prophetesses of his days: "Even so the maiden who now serves the god here was born of as lawful and honorable wedlock as anyone, and her life has been in all respects proper; having been brought up in the home of poor peasants, she brings nothing with her as the result of technical skill or of any other expertness or faculty, as she goes down into the shrine".[83] A striking parallel are Tacitus' words on a prophet-priests at Klaros: "ignarus plerumque litterarum et carminum edit responsa versibus compositis super rebus quas quis mente concepit".[84] Although they come from a person who visited Klaros, their accuracy has been challenged by Lampinen as being a literary device aimed at creating contrast between the lack of education and veracity of responses.[85] No matter how right Plutarch was about prophetesses at Delphi, it is next to impossible that prophets at Klaros and prophetesses at Didyma had no advanced education. They were all scions of elite families of Asia Minor in the age of the Second Sophistic which placed *paideia* at the top of social virtues. Almost certainly the opposite is true: thanks to proper education prophets at Klaros and prophetesses ad Didyma could produce oracular responses in hexameter if they thought hexameter was the proper form for a particular oracle.[86] At Klaros inscriptions uniquely attest officials whose title *thespiodos* might suggests that at one point they were involved in versifying the oracles delivered by a *prophetes*.[87] But no *thespiodos* is ever attested acting in this capacity – all are named as part of dating formulae in Klarian inscriptions. Didyma also knew a low-ranking officials (*hypochrestes*) who most likely registered questions from enquirers and answers – in Didyma the office called *chresmographion* almost certainly served this purpose.[88]

In general modern scholarship tend to attribute to male characters at Didyma, a *prophetes* or a *hypochrestes*, an important mediating role between a *prophetis* and the people, in versifying an oracular response or in the very act of announcing it to the consultants from the door separating the *pronaos* from the *adyton* to which no outsiders were admitted.[89] However, attributing to a male agent composing oracles in verse is a conjecture of modern scholarship not supported by a shred of evidence.[90] In principal the issue of versifying of oracles is largely overstated in modern literature. Since only 16 out of ca. 80

83 Plu. *mor*. 405c: ὥσπερ ἡ νῦν τῷ θεῷ λατρεύουσα γέγονε μὲν εἴ τις ἄλλος ἐνταῦθα νομίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ βεβίωκεν εὐτάκτως, τραφεῖσα δ'ἐν οἰκίᾳ γεωργῶν πενήτων οὔτ' ἀπὸ τέχνης οὐδὲν οὔτ' ἀπ'ἄλλης τινὸς ἐμπειρίας καὶ δυνάμεως ἐπιφερομένη κάτεισιν εἰς τὸ χρηστήριον. Transl. by F.C. Babbitt (Loeb).

84 Tac. *An*. II 54.1.

85 Lampinen 2013, 62.

86 Tac. *An*. II 54.1 attributes to the *sacerdos* (prophet) giving oracular responses in verse.

87 The interpretative explanation of the word θεσπιῳδός (LSJ, s.v. II) is "to hold office of θεσπιῳδός, i.e. versifier of oracles". There is no evidence for a *thespiodes* versifying an oracle. On *thespiodes* in Klaros see Lampinen 2013, 65–67, 69.

88 *Chresmographion* attested as building, with no specific information on its purpose: *Didyma* 31, 32. The hypothetical function of it: Rehm on *Didyma* 297; Parke 1985, 218–219; Fontenrose 1988, 43

89 Haussoulier 1920; Günther 1971, 119–123; Parke 1985, 214–219; Fontenrose 1988, 80–81; Busine 2005, 49–50; Lampinen 2013, 73; Nissinen 2017, 26, 127.

90 Lampinen 2013, 78.

oracles of which we know are in verse, versification clearly was not seen as an indispensible characteristic of Didymaean mantic but rather as a matter of choice of the mantic agent. One may have the impression that the insistence of modern scholars on the active role of a male mediating agent stems from an early-modern bias perceiving women in classical antiquity as socially feeble characters, almost always in need of a male guardian. But this is obviously anachronistic with respect to elite women of Hellenistic and early-Imperial times. Hence the more obvious solution is that it was the *prophetis* who played the paramount and independent role in the mantic procedure at Didyma. While in the *adyton* she received the words of Apollo, then she decided to transmit them to the consultant in prose or in verse, and then she pronounced the oracle while showing up at the door separating the *pronaos* from the *adyton* in the way paralleling the epiphany of a priestess or goddess in a window in Near Eastern temples.[91] If this solution is adopted, one might think that a *hypochrestes*, apart from invoicing a consultant for the oracle, penned down an oracular response delivered by a *prophetis* – thus performing a similar service as a secretary would do for any well-born person who was dictating rather that writing with their own hand. Based on the name of the Didymaean office (*chresmographion*) modern scholarship presumes that it was there where official copies of oracular responses were produced and issued to the consultants.[92]

Conclusions

Among top officials of Didyma *prophetes* and *prophetis* stand out because of their title, seemingly indicating the involvement of their bearers in the core mantic activity of the Oracle. The Didymaean *prophetes*, one of the best attested officials in Greek history, never actually prophesized, nor is his any activity in versifying, pronouncing or transmitting oracular responses attested. One can only guess that the title *prophetes* attested for 226 notables of Hellenistic and Roman Miletos, was applied in distant past to people who actually prophesized at Didyma while in Hellenistic and Roman time it stayed as a fossil bringing additional splendor to top officials of the temple and Oracle of Apollo. The Hellenistic and Roman-age *prophetes* was the key figure in Didyma, presiding over the temple and Oracle of Apollo, leading processions, hosting at banquets the venerable religious body of Kosmoi. *Prophetai* were selected by lot from among scions of the best families of Miletos, the same which provided the city with its eponymous *stephanephoroi*. Their importance within the polis of the Milesians grew in the Hellenistic age to peak in the 1st c. BCE, in a way heralding the constitutional shift from the vigorous democracy of the early- to mid-Hellenistic age to the oligarchic regime of *honoratii* typical of the high Empire. The mantic procedure at Didyma, as we know it in the age of high to late Empire, was the domain of *prophetis*, a well-born woman who pronounced the words of Apollo to the enquirers. Nothing is known of any mediating officials whom modern scholarship

91 For the last item see Stoneman 2011, 88.
92 Parke 1985, 214–215; Lampinen 2013, 85.

often wants to put between her and the people who asked for Apollo's oracle. We may be quite sure that a *prophetis*, like any elite character of classical antiquity, had female and male personnel at her disposal, among them a *hypochrestes* acting as her secretary, penning down her inspired words. Opposite to exceptionally well attested *prophetai*, only four to five names of prophetesses are known to us, still the highest number of female mantic officials in the Greek world. This must have resulted from a cultural taboo of sorts, contributing to the aura of secrecy surrounding *prophetis*, the transmitters of the unfailing words of Apollo.

Catalogue of *Prophetai* in Didyma

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
1	Before 238/7 BCE	D. 216, 142	P	Eirenias s. of. Hekataios		family of Pr., adopted politician Eirenias[93]
2	230/29 BCE	D. 447	Inv.	son of Theokrines		
3	225/4 BCE	D. 450	Inv.	son of Melesippos		ancestors: Ta., S.
4	223/2 BCE	D. 27A	BA	Aristeides s. of Polyxenos	Syn,, coin magistrate?[94]	s. of Ta.
5	220/19 BCE	D. 216, M. 124	P, L	Euktimenos s. of Phormion	S.	brother of Pr. and S., uncle of Eirenias, politician
6	217/6 BCE	D. 453, M. 124	Inv., L	Alexandros s. of Lochegos		his grandfather T., his great grandfather S.
7	213/2 BCE	D. 214, 216, M. 124, 147	P, L, D	Hekataios s. of Phormion	S., loaned money to Miletos, perhaps Syn.[95]	
8	204/3 BCE	D. 216, M 955	P, L	Ammonios s. of Phormion	perhaps a contributor of money to some cause[96]	brother of S. and Pr., uncle of Eirenias, politician

93 Günther 2017, 216.
94 Günther 2017, 90.
95 Günther 2017, 222.
96 Günther 2017, 36.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
9	beg. 2nd c. BCE	D. 87, M. 955	TH, L	Antigonos s. of Hekataios	Amb., Syn., pytharches	brother of Eirenias[97]
10	after 190 BCE	D. 22	BA	[Phormion? s. of Euk]timenos		perhaps s. of S., related to Pr.[98]
11	180s BCE	D. 461	Inv.	[- -]nias s. of Phaidon		
12	180s BCE	D. 462, M. 150	Inv.	Pythion s. of Posiedonios	Syn.	
13	180s BCE	D. 33	BA	Archelas s. of Archelas		perhaps s. of S.[99]
14	180s BCE	D. 34	BA	Pelleneus s. of. Prokritos	subscriber[100]	
15	185–180 BCE	D. 464	Inv.	Tauriskos s. of Neilostratos		
16	c. 180 BCE	D. 463	Inv.	Antipatros s. of Menestratos		adoptive father S.
17	c. 180 BCE	D. 35	BA	Sopolis s. of Phaidon		father of building commissioner, great grandfather of S.[101]
18	beg. 170s BCE	D. 465, M. 1066[102]	Inv., D	Pasikles s. of Philodo[- -]	perhaps S.	
19	170s BCE	D. 466, M. 1067	Inv., D	Antenor s. of Euandrides	S.	great grandson of periodoneikes and S., s. of S.[103]
20	c. 170 BCE	D. 469, SEG 26.1235 = D. 625	Inv., BA, D	Thrasys s. Arkesilaos		
21	160s BCE	D. 468, 226, M. 147	Inv., P, D	Athenaios s. of Herakleitos	his mother loaned money to Miletos in his name	

97 Günther 2017, 51.
98 Günther 2017, 626.
99 Günther 2017, 113.
100 Günther 2017, 511.
101 Günther 2017, 570.
102 Günther 2017, 508.
103 Günther 2017, 47.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
22	late 160s BCE	D. 214, 470	P, Inv.	Pasikles s. of Antipatros		father of a Pr.
23	c. 160 BCE	D. 471, SEG 58.370[104]	Inv., D	Babon s. of Apemantos	perhaps a coin magistrate and judge	
24	c. 160 BCE	D. 472	Inv.	Sopolis s. Autophon		
25	160–150 BCE	D. 141	TH	Autophon s. of Heroides	Ta.	
26	c. mid.-2nd c. BCE	D. 52a	BA	Menestratos	Ag.	
27	150–100 BCE	D. 124	D.	Theodotos s. of Alexandros	S.?[105]	
28	2nd half of 2nd c.-beg. 1st c. BCE	D. 346	H	Demetrios s. of Glaukias	S., founded statues for Didymeion	H. among his descendents (Nannion d. of Iason)
29	late 2nd c. BCE	D. 474	Inv.	son of Phanias		
30	late 2nd c. BCE	D. 86	TH	Antiphanes s. of Moschion	S.	descendent of S.?[106]
31	c. 105 BCE	D. 475	Inv.	Lykinos s. of Molossos		his father coin magistrate[107]
32	2nd c. BCE	D. 88	TH	Hegemon s. of Hermonax		
33	2nd c. BCE	D. 91	TH	Leontiskos		
34	end 2nd/ beg. 1st c. BCE	D. 221 II	P	Theokrines s. of Theokrines	T.?	perhaps adoptive father of Pr.[108]
35	end 2nd/ beg. 1st c. BCE	D. 392	T	Menekrates s. of Menekrates		
36	c. 100 BCE	D. 46	BA	Boethos s. of Eumechanos	proxenos[109]	

104 Günther 2017, 138.
105 Günther 2017, 314.
106 Günther 2017, 462.
107 Günther 2017, 410.
108 Günther 2017, 318.
109 Günther 2017, 148.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
37	beg. 1st c. BCE	D. 227 aI, 259, 322, M. 441	P, epitaph, H	Euandrides s. of Alexion	descendent of benefactor Eudemos[110]	father of H., grandfather of Pr.
38	beg. 1st c. BCE	D. 228 II, 726	P, T	Menekles s. of Artemas		
39	100–50 BCE	D. 221 III	P	Menekles s. of Antipater		
40	95–85 BCE	D. 214 A II	P	son of Minnion		grandson of Pr.
41	84/3 BCE	D. 266	P	Hippon s. of Hippon		
42	70 BCE	D. 204, 216, M. 125	P, L	Antigonos s. of Menodoros	S.	adopted into family of a few S.
43	69? BCE	D. 222	P	Me[- -]		
44	66 BCE	D. 220, 229 II, M. 125	P, L	Philodemos s. of Pamphilos	S. in the same year as P.[111]	his father and brothers S.
45	63 BCE	D. 205B, 227, 230I, 367, 390 AII, M. 125	P, T, L	Eukrates s. of Eukrates	S.	his son S. in 64/3 BCE and Pr. in 53; brother of 2 S., adoptive brother of S.[112]
46	61 BCE	D. 215 BII, 216, 222, M. 125, ASA 1963/4 323, no 22	P, L	Menekles s. of Hierokles	S., phrourarchos on Lepsia[113]	
47	60 BCE	D. 231 I, 340	P, H	Aristokritos s. of [-]demos		
48	59 BCE	D. 204, 216, 227 BII, 235 AI, 340, 390 BII. M. 125	P, H, T, L	Lysimachos s. of Aristeas	S.	father of Pr. and S., grandson of S.

110 Günther 2017, 257.
111 Didyma 229 II, l. 8: αὐτοέτεις ἱεροὺς θεὶς ἔπι σοὶ στεφάνους. Günther 2017, 612.
112 Günther 2017, 267.
113 Manganaro 1963/4, 323, no 22; Günther 2017, 431.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
49	58 BCE	SEG 53.1270 = D. 679 II	L	Thokrines s. of Antigonos adopted by Theokrines		
50	57–55 BCE	D. 231 II, 266, M. 125	P, L	Apollonios s. of Polites, adopted by Kallikrates	S.	father of S. and perhaps of Pr.[114]
51	54 BCE	D 104, 394, 390AI	T, TH	Sopolis s. of Moschos		a member of Sopolis-Moschos family, perhaps s. of Pr.[115]
52	53 BCE	D. 104, 227 AII, 390 AII. M. 125	P, H, T, L	Menodoros s. of Eukrates	S.	cousin of S., father of S. and Pr.[116]
53	52 BCE	SEG 53.1270 = D. 679 III, M. 125	L	Antiochos s. of Antiochos	S.	father of S.
54	c. mid-1st c. BCE	D. 95, 205, 250, M. 125	P, L	C. Iulius Apollonios	S., Gym., str., prostates of gerousia	s. of S. amicus Caesaris, father of S. and Pr.[117]
55	51 BCE	D. 231 III, 723	P, T	Apatourios s. ofThargelios[118]		
56	c. 50 BCE	D. 232 AI, 205, 340, M. 125, 126	P, H, L, D	Amphithemis s. of Eukrates	S.	his brothers and cousins S. and Pr.[119]
57	50–1 BCE	D. 259, 322, 345	P, H	Eudemos s. of Dion[120]	euergetes	family of benefactors, one S.
58	44 BCE	D. 391 AII, 231 III, 233 I, M. 126	P, T, L	Phanias s. of Melas	S.	

114 Günther 2017, 81.
115 Günther 2017, 570.
116 Günther 2017, 445.
117 Günther 2017, 345
118 Günther 2017, 65; Günther, *Didyma* III.7, 92–93 (ad 723).
119 Günther 2017, 36.
120 Günther 2017, 262.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
59	43 BCE	D. 213B, 233	P	Melas s. of Menkrates	S.[121], Ag.	
60	41/0 BCE	D. 395, 396	T	Moschion s. of Hephaistion		
61	after 39 BCE	D. 218 III	P	[- -]s s. of Philidas		his daughter H.
62	38/7 BCE	D. 342, 104, SEG 46.1439	H	Ouliades s. of Antiochos	Pr. when ancestral constitution was restored	s. of S.
63	after 38 BCE	D. 218 II	P	Lysimachos s. of Sopolis	Amb. to Ptolemy XII and to Rome	his son and grandson S.[122]
64	36/5 BCE	D. 229 I, 232, 308 I, 679a	P, H	Minnion s. of Aristeas, adopted by Minnion	S.	father of S., grandfather of S. and Pr., ancestors euergetai
65	before 34/3 BCE	D. 205, 218, 391 BI	P, T	Eukrates s. of Amphithemis		father of Pr.
66	34/3 BCE	D. 205, 397, 398, M. 126	P, T, L	Hegemandros s. of Nikomachos adopted by Melas	S.	
67	33–26 BCE	D. 202 II, 205, M. 6, 7, 126	P, L	C. Iulius Epikrates	S., most influential Milesian of the age of Augustus[123]	s. of S.
68	26/5 BCE	D. 205, 391 BII, M. 126	P, T, L	Hekatomnos s. of Nikomedes	S.	perhaps father of Pr.[124]
69	25/4 BCE	D. 218I, 391 BIII, 391 BI	P, T	Amphithemis s. of Eukrates		s. and cousin of S., Pr.
70	19/8 BCE	D. 227 BII, 390 BII, M. 126, 794	P, T, L	Aristeas s. of Lysimachos	S., panegyrikos	brother and father of S.

121 Günther 2017, 425.
122 Günther 2017, 414.
123 Günther 2017, 346–347.
124 Günther 2017, 223.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
71	18/7 BCE	D. 50.1 A21, 229, 232, 374, M. 126, 127	P, L, topos	Aristeas s. of Minnion[125]	S.	s. of Pr. and S.
72	17/16 BCE	D. 234 BII, 378	P, H	M. Antonius Polites Tryblichos	T.	through adoption his son member of family of S.; his descendents were asiarchs
73	c. 15 BCE	D. 105, 106, 218 IV, 391, M. 126, 271	S, P, L	Sopolis s. of Antigonos	commissioner of works at Didyma	in family Ag., S.
74	15 or 11 BCE	D. 50.1 A63, 218 I, 391 BI, BIII, 408, M. 126	T, L, topos	Hegemandros s. of Hegemandros[126]	twice Pr., S.	
75	14/3BCE[127]	D. 230 II, 735	P, Inv.	Dionysios s. of Hekataios	S.	in family S., Pr. H., choregos
76	after 15 BCE	D. 214 AIII, 262, 263, M. 127	P, L	Theon s. of Theon	twice Pr., S., Gym., Ko., Pa., Ag., choregos, boegos	
77	7/6 BCE	D. 346, M. 127	H, L	Eukrates s. of Menodoros[128]	S.	his father S.
78	5/4 BCE	D. 197	TH	C. Iulius Eratosthenes		
79	3/2 BCE	D. 50.1 A9, 42, 205 B, M. 127	P, L, topos	Charmes s. of Thrasonides	S.	brother of Pr. and S., father and cousin of S., among his descendents Pr. and H.[129]

125 Günther 2017, 89.
126 Günther 2017, 291.
127 Date and identity of *prophetai* attested by both inscriptions: Günther, Didyma III.7, 103 n. 734 (ad 735).
128 Günther 2017, 268.
129 Günther 2017, 633.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
80	2/1 BCE	D. 345	H	Thrason-ides s. of Thrasonides		his brothers and sons S.
81	late 1st c. BCE	D. 214 B	P	M. Antonius Rufus		
82	late 1st c. BCE	D. 205	P	Sophanes s. of Hakatomnos		perhaps s. of S. and descendent of Pr.[130]
83	late 1st c. BCE	D. 232 AIII, M. 126, 174	P, L, S	Apatourios s. of Apatourios	S., choregos	
84	1st c. BCE	D. 215 BI,	P	Andronikos s. of Andronikos		descendent of a Str., perhaps brother of S.[131]
85	1st c. BCE	D. 218 IV	P	s. of Antigonos adopted by Artemon		
86	1st c. BCE	D. 205	P	Klei[-] s. of Apollonios		
87	1st c. BCE	D. 393	T	Aristeas[132]		
88	late-Hell.	D. 421	TH?	Pasikles s. of Ne[- -]		
89	late-Hell.	D. 292	P	s. of Ouliades	Gym., choregos euergetes	descendent of Pr.?
90	late 1st c. BCE/ early 1st c. CE	D. 308 III	H	Aristeas s. of Apatourios	S.of18/17BCE?[133]	
91	1st c. BCE/1st c. CE	D. 257	P	Dionysios s. of Antiochos	Gym., Str., Ag., paidonomos, all liturgies	father: liturgies; nauarchoi and litourgoi among ancestors
92	1st c. BCE/ 1st c. CE	D. 253	P	Asklepiades s. of Dionysios	Gym., Pa., Str., Ag.	ancestors litourgoi and nauarchoi

130 Günther 2017, 577.
131 Günther 2017, 44.
132 Günther 2017, 87.
133 Günther 2017, 88.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
93	1st c. BCE/ 1st c. CE	D. 325	H	Archip-pos? s. of Hekatomnos	Amb., liturgies, awarded with golden statue	father of H., family of euergetai
94	26/7 CE[134]	D. 341, 728, M. 127	H, T, L	Minnion s. of Menophilos adopted by Minnion	S.	s. of S, brother of Pr. and S., father of S.[135]
95	early 1st c.? CE	D. 50 I 35	topos	Artemon		
96	early 1st c. CE	D. 412	T	Diogenes s. of Diogenes	S.	father of S.
97	1–20 CE	D. 284, ined. Inv. E 220	P	Sophanes s. of Philostratos[136]		father and cousin of Pr. and S.
98	1–50 CE	D. 283, 328, 399, 50	P, topos	Straton s. of Diogenes[137]		s. and grandson of S.[138]
99	1–50 CE	D. 236 B II	P	Phanias		
100	7/8 CE	D. 229 I, 374, M. 127	P, H, L	Minnion s. of Aristeas	S.	s. of S. and Pr.; grandson of S,; father of S and H.
101	10/11 CE	D. 235 AI	P	Artemon s. of Eirenias		adoptive grandson of S.; father of 2 H.
102	after 13 CE	D. 251, M. 127	P, L	Artemon s. of Straton	S.	s. and brother of S.
103	17/18 CE	D. 284, 410, M. 126	P, T, L	Chionis s. of Philostratos		brother of Pr., father of Pr. and S., grandfather of equites[139]
104	19/20 CE	D. 205, 236 CI, M. 127	P, L	Amphithemis s. of Eukrates	S., philokaisar	s. and grandson of S.[140]

134 Date: Günther, *Didyma* III.7, 96 (ad. 727).
135 Günther 2017, 455.
136 Günther 2017, 578.
137 Günther 2017, 563.
138 Günther 2017, 563.
139 Günther 2017, 635.
140 Günther 2017, 37.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
105	10–30CE[141]	D. 221 I	P	[Philost]ratos s. of Phi[lo] stratos		s. of S.
106	20–50 CE	D. 284, M. 128	P, L	Sophanes s. of Sophanes	S., Ag.	s. of Pr., brother of S., Pr., H.
107	20–50 CE	D. 284, M. 128	P, L.	Nikomedes s. of Sophanes	S., Ag.	his father Pr., uncle S and Pr., brother S., cousins Pr.
108	20–50 CE	D. 284	P	Aristeas s. of Sophanes adopted by Lykinos	S., Ag.	his father Pr., uncle S and Pr., brother S., cousins Pr.
109	ca. 35 CE	D. 284, M 128	P, L	Claudius Philostratos s. of Chionis	S.	s. of Pr., brother of S. and Pr.
110	31–50 CE	D. 261	P	Thaliarchos s. of Thaliarchos	S., Ko., Ta., Gym., awarded with statues	his father Olympic victor; his mother: d. of litourgos awarded with statues
111	mid-1st c. CE	D. 339, 193	H	Claudius Menophilos s. of Minnion	twice Pr., S., Ag., basileus in Ionian koinon	s. and grandson of S., father of Pr. and H.
112	50–100 CE	D. 324	H	Damas s. of Artemon		
113	50–100 CE	D. 264	P	Iason s. of Iason	3 times Pr., Pan., prostates of gerousia, Amb. to Emperor, significant euergesiai	father of Gym, H.
114	51–100 CE	D. 237 II, 268, M. 134, RPC I 2712-2717, Suppl. I 2712a	P, D, coin	Ti. Claudius Damas	twice Pr. (second time at 81), St., Arch., coin official[142]	

141 Günther 2017, 616.
142 Günther 2017, 374.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
115	51–100 CE	D. 50.1 A54. 50.2 A61, 223B, 343	P, H, topos	L. Malius Saturninus	all liturgies, S.	s. of equites, tribunus militaris, Gym., S; his daughter H.[143]
116	51–100 CE	D. 308 II	H	Melas		
117	70s CE	D. 272	P	Claudius Chionis	Arch. (in the same year as Pr.), archiereus of Augusti, choregos, Gym., equites, praef. fabrum, tribunus, comes in aerarium of Asia, many embassies to Rome	s. of S. and Pr., S and Pr. among his cousins, Pr. and Arch. among ancestors
118	late 1st c. CE	D. 334, 193	H	Claudius Dionysios s. of Claudius Menophilos		s. of S. and twice Pr., grandson of S. and Pr., great-grandson of S., brother of H.
119	late 1st c. CE	D. 284, M. 189	P, TH	C. Iulius Antiochos	Ag., Gym., euergetes	descendent of two S.; his son S.
120	97–102 CE	D. 318, 407	H, T	Emperor Trajan	S.	
121	c. 100 CE	D. 274, 343	P, H	Metrodoros s. of Metrodoros		
122	1st c. CE	D. 236 BI	P	Dionysios s. of Photides		possibly descendent of S., grandfather of Pr.[144]
123	1st c. CE	D. 215A, 235 III, 265	P	L. Iunius Poudes		
124	1st c. CE	D. 236 CII, 281	P	Posidonios s. of Diodotos	S., Ko., Gym., Str., archiereus of Ionia	His father leitourgos honored with decrees, his son served Zeus
125	1st c. CE	D 237 I, 255	P	L. Vitellius Crispus	Pan., Gym., Str., Amb. to Rome[145]	his s. Pr.

143 Günther 2017, 418.
144 Günther 2017, 202.
145 Günther 2017, 146.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
126	1st c. CE	D. 256, 672	P	Diodotos s. of Agathias	Ag., Gym., Ko.	
127	late 1st/ early 2nd c. CE	D. 238 I	P	Hermokles s. of Epikrates	3 times victor koina Asias	father-in-lawofH.[146]
128	late 1st/ early 2nd c. CE	SEG 30.1286 = D. 708	H	Claudius Charmes neoteros		perhaps great-grandson of S. and uncle of H.[147]
129	late 1st c. CE	D. 50.1 A19, 22, D 50.1 St. 24, D 50.2 St 26, D. 50.3 St. 16	topos	Sophanes		
130	1st–2nd c. CE	D. 235 AII	P	[- -]s s. of Di[ogenes]?		
131	c. 103/4 CE	D. 360	H	Ti. Claudius Theodotos	Arch., hypochrestes	
132	beg. 2nd c. CE	D. 327	H	Flavius L[- -]		
133	beg. 2nd c. CE.	D. 372	H	Apellaios s. of Zosimos	Ag., Bo., agoranomos, Pan., seitones, Arch., argyrotamias	father of archiereus, great grandfather of prokitharistes, ancestor of H.
134	beg. 2nd c. CE	D. 683	P	[- -]s son of Biareus	pytharches, amphithales,	Pr. and S. among his ancestors, mother H. and S., father Pr.
135	100–150 CE	D. 127, 150	D.	Phanias	Platonic philosopher[148]	
136	130–150 CE	D. 254	P	L. Aphidianos Kallikrates	Euergetes, honored by boule and demos	
137	137/8 CE	D. 494, 745	TH, letter of Emperor	Emperor Hadrian	S.	

146 Günther 2017, 248.
147 Günther 2017, 373.
148 Günther 2017, 597.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
138	117–138 CE	D. 206, M. 1168	P, TH	Eperastos[149]		
139	117–138 CE	D. 245 II, 246	P	P. Aelius Granianos		
140	mid-2nd c. CE	D. 50.2 A66, 236 BIII, 286, 287, 335, 337	P, H, topos	T. Flavius Andreas s. of Photides	single candidate for Pr., S., Ag., Ko., archiereus of Ionian league, Str., prostates of gerousia, many benefactions	descendent of S.
141	mid-2nd c. CE	D. 50.1 A3, 50.3 St. 39	topos	Lykinos		
142	150–200 CE	D. 238 II, 219, 352	P, H	T. Flavius Andreas s. of Andreas	S., Arch., coin official, member of 4-person embassy to Rome	his father S. and Pr., mother H., family of Pr. and S.
143	150–200 CE	D. 50.3 A5, 287	P, topos	T. Flavius Dionysodoros s. of Flavius Andreas	archiereus of Ionia, Gym., Ag.	his father T. Flavius Andreas (above), mother H.
144	150–200 CE	D. 236 CIII, 269, 270, 687	P	Ti. Claudius Marcianus Smaragdos Soterichos	Ko., Gym, Amb. to Augusti, euergetes	
145	late 2nd c. CE	D. 242	P	P. Aelius Aelianus	coin official of 193–211?[150]	
146	late 2nd c. CE	D. 686	P	P. Aelianus Themistokles		father asiarches; archiereis, senators, equites among ancestors
147	2nd c. CE[151]	D. 260, 680 II	P	Herakleon s. of Nikades, called Isas	his splendid performance attested by Oracle	his daughter H.

149 Günther 2017, 230.
150 Günther 2017, 18.
151 Günther, Didyma III.7, 63 (ad 680).

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
148	2nd c. CE	D. 93, 267, 373, 638	S, P, TH	T. Claudius Hadrianus Andreides Chresimos	Ko.	from family of S. and Pr., his wife descendent of Neleus (SEG 60.1272)[152]
149	2nd c. CE	D. 78	S	Aelianus Apollonios		
150	2nd c. CE	D. 152, 279	TH, P	M. Ulpius Flavianus Phileas	S., Ko., Gym., generous benefactions	s. of archiereus,[153] from family of nauarchoi and founders of the city
151	2nd c. CE	D. 177	TH	Aelianus		
152	2nd c. CE	D. 190	TH	P. Aelius Berenikianos		
153	2nd c. CE	D. 276	P	T. Vergilius Flavius Dionysios		
154	2nd c. CE	D. 280	P	K. Pomponius Pollion	physician, euergetes, covered cost of a H.	
155	2nd c. CE	D. 349, 223	H	Ulpius Menandros[154]	S., Arch., Pan.	grandfather of a H.
156	2nd c. CE	D. 329	H	M. Ulpius Soteas		
157	2nd c. CE	D. 310	H	Aelius Aelianus	stoic philosopher, in many cities awarded with citizenship and boule-membership	his d. H. in the year of his propheteia
158	2nd c. CE	D. 282	TH	Posidonios	3 times Pr., on occasion of his selection greeted by Apollo's oracle, leitourgos	
159	2nd c. CE	D. 353, 354, 684	P	P. Samiarius Nonianus		sister H., family of leitourgoi

152 Günther 2017, 376.
153 Günther 2017, 497.
154 Günther 2017, 496.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
160	2nd c. CE	D. 654	TH	Flavianus Metrodoros		
161	late 2nd/ early 3rd c. CE	D. 639	S	Herakleides		
162	end 2nd/ beg. 3rd c. CE	D. 84	D.	[- -]nos Menandros	Ag., Arch., Bo., grammateus, gynaikonomos, basileus, prostates of gymnasia	s. and relative of S., Pr., archiereus of Emperor
163	end 2nd/ beg. 3rd c. CE	D. 278	P	Ulpius Athenagoras	Bo., Ag., other offices and litourgies, Apollo gave him a spontaneous oracle	father: panegyriarches, mother: H
164	end 2nd/ beg. 3rd c. CE	D. 169, 170, 241, 363A, M. 613	TH, P, H	Aelianus Poplas	S., Ta., Bo., Pan., Arch., archiereus of Augusti, ambassador to Rome	father of H., family ties with leading families[155]
165	end 2nd/ beg. 3rd c. CE	D. 277	P	T. Flavius Philoponos		father of Pr.
166	end 2nd/ 3rd c. CE	SEG 56.1217 = D. 646[156]	votive epigram for Pan	Artemidoros		
167	2nd–3rd c. CE	M. 121	TH	Nonnios Andreas	S., Ag., Bo.	
168	2nd–3rd c. CE	M. 935	Oracle	Ulpianus		
169	before 212 CE	D. 181, M. 1111	TH	Aurelius Ktesias	Arch., coin official[157]	
170	c. 200 CE	D. 181	TH	M. Aurelius Ulpius	equites	
171	c. 200 CE	D. 155, M. 944	TH, cult calendar	Vergilius Basileides		

155 Günther 2017, 17.
156 Date: Günther, *Didyma* III.7, 35 (ad 646).
157 Günther 2017, 127.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
172	c. 200 CE	D. 240	P	Agrippinus s. of Agrippinus	Ko.	
173	202 CE	D. 81, 182, 188, 189, 243, 244M. 26, SEG 33.770	S, TH, list	P. Aelius Granianos Phanias Artemidoros	Arch.?, Ag	grandfather of Pr.[158]
174	212 CE or later	D. 164, 167, 310	TH, H	Aurelius Chairemon	twice Pr.	father of H.
175	212 CE or later	D. 164	TH	Licinnius Hermippos		
176	212 CE or later	D. 180, 196	TH	Aurelius Agathopous		
177	early 3rd c. CE	D. 277	P	T. Flavius Ulpianus		s. and brother of Pr., married into family of Aelianus Poplas and Aelii Granianoi
178	early 3rd c. CE	D. 166, 167	TH	M. Rout(ilius) Pomponios Strategianos		
179	early 3rd c. CE	D. 165, 166	TH	Aelianus Demetrios		
180	early 3rd c. CE	D. 165	TH	Aurelius Marcellinus		
181	early 3rd c. CE	D. 174, 175	TH	Aurelius Serapion		
182	early 3rd c. CE	D. 175	TH	Aurelius Herakleides		
183	212–250 CE	SEG 27.731 = D. 660	TH	[-]L. Artemidoros		
184	c. 230 CE	D. 182, 207, 208, 210, 243, 244, M. 175	TH, P	P. Aelius Granianos Phanias	Ag., Pan., Bo.	father and grandfather of Pr., S., H.; Pr. in family

158 Günther 2017, 19.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
185	mid-3rd c. CE	D. 176 , 388, RPC X 61213	TH, H, coin	M. Antonius Polemon	Arch., coin official[159]	father of H.
186	3rd c. CE (ca. 260 acc. to PHI)	D. 182, 207, 208, 243, 244, 277, 302+303, M. 175	TH, P	P. Aelius Granianos Ameibios Maker	Didyma victor, prokitharistes of Apollo Delphinios, euergetes	s. of Pr., his wife Agatho uttered a prophecy
187	3rd c. CE	D. 207	P	P. Aelius Granianos Ameibios Dionysios		s. and grandson of Pr.
188	3rd c. CE	D. 168	TH	P. Ai[lios -]		
189	3rd c. CE	D. 249	P	M. Antonius Antiochos	asiarch	s. and descendent of asiarchs and of S.
190	3rd c. CE	D. 239 AII	P	Ision s. of Menedemos		his father Pr., his mother S.; family of Pr., S., asiarchs
191	3rd c. CE	D. 239 B	P	Anteros Sophanes s. of Asiatikos		
192	3rd c. CE	D. 252	P	Aurelius Archegos	Ag. of Megala Didymeia, Megala Pythia Panionia, prostates of Apollo of Didyma, Ko., Ag., Bo., eiranarchos, sitones, liturgies	his father Arch., Ag.
193	3rd c. CE	D. 315	H	P...os Artemidoros		
194	3rd c. CE	D. 332	H	Sellius Andreas	Archon, twice Amb. to Rome	father of H., related to S. and Pr.[160]
195	3rd c. CE	D. 83	D	Tib. Claudius Hierokles		

159 Günther 2017, 62.
160 Günther 2017, 552.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
196	3rd c. CE	M. 176	TH	M. Aurelius Granianos Poseidonios		from family of many Pr., S., Ag., asiarchs, senators, brother of S. and Pr.
197	3rd c. CE	M. 176	TH	M. Aurelius Granianos Diodoros		from family of many Pr., S., Ag., asiarchs, senators, brother of S. and Pr.
198	3rd c. CE	M. 1143	TH	Aurelius Praxias	Ag., eirenarchos, agoranomos, paidonomos	
199	3rd c. CE	SEG 58.1301 = D. 748	oracle	Agathon		
200	3rd c. CE	D. 714a	H	Apollonios		sister and mother H.
201	3rd c. CE	D. 714a	H	M. Antonius		
202	Early Empire	D. 417	TH	Ariston s. of Nikeratos		
203	Early Empire	D. 255	P	L. Vitellius Bassus	archiereus of Augusti, Gym., Ag.	son of Pr., Ag., Str., Amb., euergetes
204	Early Empire	D. 258	P	Epikrates s. of Hekataios	Gym., Pa., Str., theoros, rewarded by people with golden statues	
205	Early Empire	D. 291	P	[- -] s. of Theokrines		
206	Early Empire	D. 331	H	T. Licinius Philopator	twice Pr.	
207	Under Diocletian[161]	D. 504	oracle	Damianos		
208	361–363 CE	Jul. *Ep.* 88	letter	Emperor Julian		

161 Date: Rehm, comm.. ad loc.; *SEG* 28.852; Busine 2005, 450 (no. 34–35 in the catalogue of oracles) - Günther 2017, 161 prefers the 3rd c.

No	Date	Inscription	Category of inscription	Name	Other dignities	Important family members
209	Late Empire	D. 96	S	Eusebius s. of Antoninus		
210	Late Empire	D. 227c	P	F(lavius) Himerios	Ta., Ag.	father of H.
211	Late Empire	D. 239 AI	P	P. Eurythymos		
212	Empire	D. 285	P	Philidas s. of Herakleon	Epicurean philosopher, descendent of Ajax[162]	
213	Empire	D. 214 AVI	P	Son of Eumenes		
214	Empire	D. 50.1 A40	topos	Apollas		
215	Empire	D. 50.1 A41	topos	Eug(-)		
216	Empire	D. 50.1 A42	topos	Metrodoros		
217	Empire	D. 50.3 St17	topos	Rufus		
218	Empire	D. 50.1 St45	topos	Artemon		
219	Empire	RN 1913, 324–32 (=McCabe Milet 643)	Insc. on lead weight	Minnion	S., Pan.	
220	Empire?	D. 50.4 St6/5	topos	Posidonios s. of. Botias		
221	Empire	D. 662	TH	Ment[- -]		
222	No date	M. 839	inscr. on a marble column	Demetrios		
223	No date	D. 675	P.	[Epi]kra[t?]		

162 Günther 2017, 604 thinks that Eusebius might have Philidas in mind while mentioning a φιλόσοφος ὁμοῦ καὶ προφήτης at Miletos (*PE* IV 2.11).

Abbreviations in the *Catalogue*:

Inscription numbers	Inscription categories	Dignities/offices
D. *Didyma* II and III.7	BA Didyma building account	Ag. agnothetes
M. *Milet* I.2, I.3, VI.2, VI.3	H hydrophoros inscriptions	Amb. ambassador
SEG Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum	Inv. Didyma inventories	Arch. archiptytanis
	P prophetes inscriptions	Bo. boularchos
	S sacral (dedications,	Gym. gymnasiarchos
	altar inscriptions etc.)	H. hydrophoros
	T tamias inscriptions	Ko. kotarches
	TH tituli honorarii	Pa. paideutes
	L lists	Pan. panegyriarchos
	D decrees	Pr. prophetes
		S. stephanephoros
		Str. strategos
		Syn. synedros
		Ta. tamias

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Jewish Soldiers in the Roman Army and Their Place in Their Synagogues and Communities[1]

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The presence of Jewish soldiers in the Roman army has long been debated, characterised by divergent perspectives regarding their religious affiliation and adherence. This is especially true in the last two decades,[2] yet most publications concentrated on proving Jews served, or on certain finds indicating such service, or were an attempt to concentrate such finds in a single publication. Some have suggested these servicemen were either lay Jews or Jews who had abandoned their ancestral ways. For example, Oppenheimer argued: "It is hard to think that a compulsory service of soldiers in the Roman army existed for soldiers who kept the Shabbat, and are cautious from eating forbidden foods and such."[3] He added, while referring to Jews who had served in this army (he later claimed their number were infinitesimally small)[4]: "It is most probable that these are uneducated Jews, and others that did not keep all the mitzvot, and so the service in the Roman army did not cause them severe dilemmas, like the dietary laws or working during the Shabbat."[5]

However, it was recently shown that the observance of Shabbat should not have prevented military service.[6] Similarly, a recent article demonstrated how servicemen could have honoured any dietary restrictions in the Roman army, be it any religion or culture,

1 This research was conducted and published thanks to the funding of the National Science Centre, Poland (UMO- 2020/39/G/HS3/02059) for the project "Dawn of Monotheism?".

2 Regarding Jews in Roman armies, the articles and chapters offering a wider perspective (presented in chronological order), are: Applebaum 1965; Castritius 2002; González-Salinero 2003; Oppenheimer 2005b; Oppenheimer 2005a, 183–191; Schoenfeld 2006; Roth 2007; Chomiak 2008; Rocca 2010; Weisman 2012; Olshanetsky 2018a; Olshanetsky 2021b; González-Salinero 2022; Olshanetsky 2023a; Olshanetsky 2023b; other articles that deal with specific, or a few, finds but do not deal with the general phenomenon of Jewish military service: Applebaum 1970b; Applebaum 1970a; Applebaum 1971; Woods 1992; Scharf 1997; Ecker 2022.

3 Oppenheimer 2005b, 424.

4 Oppenheimer 2005b, 425.

5 Oppenheimer 2005b, 424.

6 González-Salinero 2022, 133–145.

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due to how the army, especially its logistical system, was constructed.[7] Albeit, there are several elements still missing in the quest to understand the phenomena of Jewish military service in the Roman army, including who served, what types of Judaism were practised and how they could heed their religion while serving. These *lacunae* are glaring, and a closer examination of archaeological evidence from synagogues can shed light on the identities and roles of numerous Jewish servicemen, many of whom occupied influential positions within their respective communities. Furthermore, insights gleaned from Rabbinic literature, such as the Talmud, provide additional references to various servicemen, with some even referencing rabbis who formerly served in the military.

Accordingly, this paper aims to compile and present a large portion of this evidence chronologically, thus offering a comprehensive analysis of the roles and significance of Jewish soldiers and officers in their religious and communal spheres. Moreover, this examination seeks to discuss the intersection of religious practices and military duties within the daily lives of these individuals. This will provide a glimpse into their attitude towards religious observance, as well as the prevailing Roman stance towards the religious obligations and customs of Jews. Lastly, it will challenge many past assumptions and offer an entirely new perspective on ancient Jewish communities, on Jews and Judaism, and the Roman Empire.

R. Elazar son of R. Shimon, 2nd c. CE

The first to be discussed, which is also the most unique, is the career of Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon. Several testimonies from Jewish sources, mostly from the Babylonian Talmud, imply that he served the Romans from a young age. It is vital to remember that Elazar lived in Judaea/Palestina, and both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud, especially the latter, were gathered and sealed centuries after his death in 207 CE or earlier. The year 207 is presumed as he died before Judah ha-Nasi fell ill for 13 years before passing away, and his death is assumed to have occurred between 217 to 224 CE. As Rabbi Elazar served at a younger age, it was suggested he served during the reign of Emperor Commodus (r. 177–192), and possibly even enlisted during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180).[8] However, exactly what was this service? According to sources, he was part of a unit tasked with policing the land. This unit belonged to the Roman authorities rather than the office of the *Nasi*, leader of the Jewish communities in the Galilee which is often translated into the president of the Jews or of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish religious council). It is possible the office of the *Nasi* was not well established at the time, and its police forces were not yet constituted.[9] Elazar's rule/rank was defined as *arcoliporin* (ארכוליפורין) in certain places,[10] but this title is unclear other than indicating Elazar's high rank and how he

7 Olshanetsky 2023a.

8 Gutman 1953, 1–2.

9 Gutman 1953, 2.

10 In *Pesikta DeRav Kahana* 11:19, it is written as *Archn Liprin* (ארכן ליפרין) and in *Sefer HeArukh*, Letter Alef 896 under the word ארך as *arcoliporin* (ארכוליפורין).

oversaw police duties. Therefore, it was suggested he was a police company commander, whose members used batons called *ropala* (ῥόπαλα).[11] It seems he was in charge of customs duties and policing the roads alongside other policing duties at a certain point, as he was mentioned as an *angrebtis* (ἀγγαρευτής) in another legend.[12] The Babylonian Talmud portrays how he was recruited to hunt thieves by an officer titled *parhagavna* (פַּרְהַגְנָא),[13] which in Sassanian Persia was the title of an officer in charge of customs and police duties.[14]

The Babylonian Talmud describes how Elazar searched for the *parhagavna* to ask him how he caught thieves.[15] From the story, it is clear that he was troubled and thoughtful regarding this matter for a long time, and that he had a theory on how to catch thieves. It included going to a tavern early in the morning and examining the tiredness of the people present. Those without a satisfactory explanation for their presence and tiredness are criminals. According to the legend, his ideas reached the king (most probably a misrepresentation of the Roman emperor), who decided to recruit him. Elazar happily agreed to the appointment and never claimed to have been forced into it. He always stuck to his investigative processes and values, other than on one occasion where he was insulted by a laundryman, and in retaliation, because of his quick temper, surrendered him to the Romans to be executed. He later regretted his decision but failed to save the man. In this story, as in others, Elazar is presented negatively: quick-tempered, proud and so on.[16] Many of the legends and negative descriptions can be considered an invention and most probably were written by the Babylonian rabbis to discredit a Palestinian rabbi, similar to the legends they offered regarding another Palestinian rabbi, Reish Lakish, who lived around the same time as Rabbi Elazar. In these tales, Reish Lakish was associated with brigands at a younger age.[17] Such negative stories regarding Reish Lakish and Rabbi Elazar only appear in the Babylonian Talmud and not the Jerusalem Talmud, which was written closer to these rabbis in both time and geography.

However, there may be some truth behind these legends, and Rabbi Elazar may have served the Romans in military/police duties for a while as his name is connected to a different relevant Talmudic debate, which is strangely rarely mentioned in the research of Jewish military service in the Roman army.[18] This story is repeated in several ancient Jewish texts. The earliest version can be found in *Bereshit Rabbah*, a text from the 4th or 5th century CE,[19] placing this version relatively close to Rabbi Elazar's lifetime:

11 Gutman 1953, 3–4.
12 Pesikta DeRav Kahana 11:22.
13 Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Metzia*, 83b.
14 Gutman 1953, 3–4.
15 Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Metzia*, 83b-84b.
16 For more, see: Shoshani 2005.
17 Olshanetsky 2021c; Olshanetsky 2023c, 129–133.
18 It was mentioned in the context of military service by: Oppenheimer 2005b, 423.
19 According to: Mack 1989, 65.

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בַּר שִׁמְעוֹן לִמְדִינָה שֶׁהָיְתָה מַכְתֶּבֶת עֲנָקְמוֹן לַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָיְתָה שָׁם אִשָּׁה אַחַת וְהָיָה ... »
לָהּ בֵּן נִנָּס, וְהָיְתָה קוֹרְאָה אוֹתוֹ מַקְרוֹא לַפְּרוֹס, אָמְרָה בְּנֵי מַקְרוֹא לַפְּרוֹס אֵין אַתֶּם מַכְתִּיבִין אוֹתוֹ,
אָמְרוּ אִם בְּעֵינַיִךְ מַקְרוֹא לַפְּרוֹס, בְּעֵינֵינוּ הוּא נִנָּס שֶׁבַּנְּנָסִים...».[20]

"... Rabbi Elazar bar Shimon said: This is analogous to a province that made a list of mighty people for the king. There was a certain woman there who had a puny son, and she would call him: Tall and Quick. She said to them: 'My son is tall and quick, but you do not conscript him?' They said: 'If, in your eyes, he is tall and quick, in our eyes he is puniest of the puny.'"[21]

In this text, Rabbi Elazar narrates an allegory of parents wishing for their son to be recruited into the army, most probably because the terms of service, salary, and possibility for social mobility were great.[22] The mother says to the recruitment officer, see how tall my son is, but the officer replies that he is tall only in her eyes. The fact he was not recruited because he was not tall enough is an indication that Elazar, as well as other Jews, knew some elements of the Roman military system, especially its recruitment method as minimum height was one of the Roman army's recruitment criteria.[23] Their knowledge of the Roman military system is evident, even if it is unclear whether the mother and son are Jewish. Furthermore, the mere idea of using such an example clearly shows how in their region of Judaea/Palestina, like the rest of the empire, the military profession was sought after, and many parents wished their children to pursue it. The story can also serve as an example of the daily encounter between the Jewish communities and Roman administration, alongside the latter's attempt to recruit the former.

Elazar's use of this allegory implies how a mother's desire for their son to be enlisted was well known in rabbinic circles, and it should not be seen as alien to Jewish culture. This is especially true in this specific case, as it is narrated by a rabbi who is often claimed to have served the Romans in military or police duties. Accordingly, it is possible the mother in the story is not foreign but Jewish, as the reasons and benefits of serving were numerous. It is equally interesting that this legend is repeatedly mentioned and reused up until the 13th century, including in the 8th-9th century *Aggadat Bereshit*,[24] and the 11th-13th century *Yalkut Shimoni*.[25]

20 *Bereshit Rabbah* 65:11.

21 *Bereshit Rabbah* 65:11, translation was taken from: *The Sefaria Midrash Rabbah*, 2022, with some amendments of mine.

22 It was mentioned in the context of military service by: Oppenheimer 2005b, 422.

23 Oppenheimer 2005b, 422–423; regarding recruitment criteria like age see: Livy, 25:5:8; Livy 40:26:7; Livy 42:31:4; Livy 43:7:11; Plutarch, *Cato* 1:6; *Codex Theodosianus*, 7:13:1; see also: Roth 1999, 10; regarding height, even Vegetius in his *De re militari* states that occasionally it is best to be more lenient regarding this criteria as there are other virtues which are more important: Vegetius, *De re militari*, 1:5:1.

24 *Aggadat Bereshit*, 40:3.

25 *Yalkut Shimoni on Nach*, 332.

Fig. 1. The entrance to the building that housed Basilica I, which was previously used as a synagogue (the photo is courtesy of Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider).

Moreover, the lack of any indication of Elazar's unwillingness to serve, with an emphasis on rather his wholehearted willingness, alongside this allegory, is evidence that Jews from all circles of life, and even from the more marginalized Rabbinic Judaism, served in the Roman army or may have wished to do so. Similarly, it implies how those who served could, and indeed did, keep their Jewish identity and were active in their communities, including communal religious life, during and after their military service.

The Rue des Églises house (N1-N2)/second synagogue of Palmyra, 3rd c. CE

The next vital find, and the first from a synagogue, is from Palmyra, where a large important Jewish community, possibly one of the most important in antiquity and the most influential in that century, resided there in the 3rd century CE.[26] Three major buildings of this community were uncovered and were most probably used as synagogues. The most renowned of these structures, recently designated as the *Mezuzah* Building by Cussini,[27] comprises only a surviving doorway indicating its former grandeur. The presence of quotes from Deuteronomy on the doorway,[28] led to its classification as the *Mezuzah* Building, akin to the textual content typically found in *mezuzot* which are located on

26 For further discussions on the Jewish community in the city, see: Cussini 2024; Olshanetsky 2025b.
27 Cussini 2024.
28 CIJ II, 821 = IJO III Syr44-Syr47; Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 70–75.

doorways. However, scholarly debate persists regarding its precise function, with some proposing it served as the doorway to a synagogue.[29] The second important building is the synagogue discovered beneath the later Christian Basilica I (Fig. 1).[30]

Yet, for this discussion, the third building, located directly next to the wall of the synagogue beneath Basilica I, is the most relevant. Dubbed the Rue des Églises house (N1-N2), this building has sparked debate due to the discovery of a triclinium within the structure, boasting an impressive mosaic floor dated to the mid-3rd century CE (Fig. 2), concurrent with the synagogue's era. The mosaic has two central panels (Fig. 3), with one depicting an armed man riding a winged horse while piercing a chimaera with a spear, which was suggested as a parallel to the myth of Bellerophon slaying the chimaera (Fig. 4). The second is of a tiger hunt, with a rider firing an arrow from his bow toward a tiger that was already pierced by another arrow, with a second tiger portrayed in the panel directly under the mounted archer (Fig. 5). Occasionally, the panels are interpreted as Odaenathus' (the husband of Zenobia and king of Palmyra) triumph. This second panel has an inscription in cursive Palmyrene script, written between the bow and its string, saying: "*Diodotos has made this mosaic, himself and his sons*" (Fig. 5). It was suggested that instead of Diodotos, the inscription may have originally contained Odaenathus' or one of his son's names, which was subsequently altered to a different name. However, the proposal claiming the inscription was altered to the name of the mosaicist is tenuous,[31] as it seems unlikely for an artist to sign their name adjacent to the central figure. This implies the figure depicts the original donor, while the name in the current inscription, if it indeed was amended, represents the name of the donor who paid for the alteration of the room and mosaic, including the additional mosaic in the direction of Jerusalem. However, if the mosaic was meant to originally represent Odaenathus and one of his sons, and the inscription was to that effect, then the changes in the inscription most likely date to after Zenobia's defeat. In such a case, the new name does not necessarily represent someone who donated a refurbishment, but rather an attempt to erase the mosaic's connection to Zenobia. Roman rule saw such connections as unfavourable, and the name *Diodotos* could merely be the name of a prominent member of the community. Nevertheless, it is possible the original inscription before the alterations referred to the donor and his sons. Thus, the question remains: does the mosaic depict the donor and one of his sons, or Odaenathus and one of his sons, or whether they are one and the same, and Odaenathus himself donated the mosaic?

29 Landauer 1884, 933; Berger 1891b, 65–72; Berger 1891a, 260; Kaizer 2010, 117.

30 Jastrzębowska 2011–2012; Jastrzębowska 2013, 177, n.2; the person who attempted to solve this ambiguousness is Cussini: Cussini 2024, 109–110.

31 Gawlikowski 2003, 315, 318; Gawlikowski 2021, 70; Cussini 2024, 110–111.

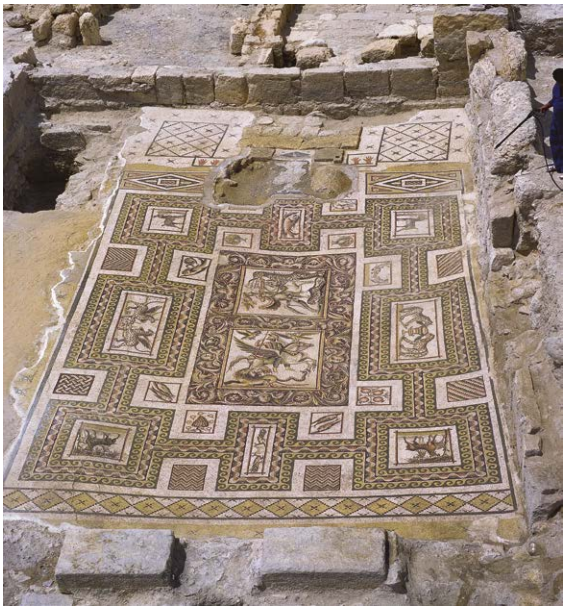

Fig. 2. The room with the mosaic in the Rue des Églises house (N1-N2). The picture was taken in the direction of Jerusalem, i. e. South-South-west (the photo is courtesy of Michał Gawlikowski).

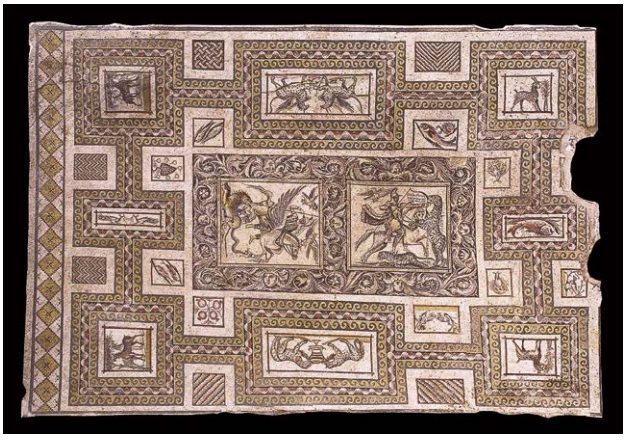

Fig. 3. The main part of the Rue des Églises house (N1-N2) mosaic, which was sometimes referred to as "Odaenathus's victories/triumph", with the two middle panels, one depicting the Bellerophon scene and the other the hunting scene (the photo is courtesy of Michał Gawlikowski).

Fig. 4. A closeup of the panel of Bellerophon slaying the chimaera (the photo is courtesy of Michał Gawlikowski).

Fig. 5. Closeup of the panel depicting the tiger hunt with the inscription "*Diodotos has made this mosaic, himself and his sons.*" (the photo is courtesy of Michał Gawlikowski).

In addition, the mosaic features Jewish religious motifs, including a menorah and two pairs of open hands, located on panels adjacent to the main mosaic and facing towards Jerusalem.[32] Gawlikowski proposed that these areas with Jewish symbols were added shortly after the original mosaic was laid,[33] indicating a shift in the room's function to serve as a prayer hall.[34] However, given that the two mosaics were installed nearly simultaneously, it is inappropriate to categorise them as two distinct phases of the same room. Additionally, it is impossible to definitively assert that the room was not under the ownership of the Jewish community during the initial mosaic installation. This suggests two potential scenarios. The room either initially served as a dining hall or meeting space for the Jewish community and was later repurposed as a prayer hall/synagogue, or it functioned as a prayer hall/synagogue from its inception, even before the addition of the second mosaic. Accordingly, if Gawlikowski's interpretation is accurate and the mosaic indeed portrays Odaenathus and one of his sons, it would highlight the remarkable and unparalleled link between Odaenathus, Zenobia, and their lineage to the Jewish community of Palmyra, especially as the mosaic may have been donated by Odaenathus himself. However, in the case where the mosaic depicts a different donor and his sons, the fact the donor wanted both him and his son to be depicted as armed riders raises the possibility they were military men. It is probable that in such a case, they may have been high-ranking officers or generals in Odaenathus' army, as only soldiers of such rank would be wealthy and prominent enough to donate such a magnificent mosaic, and maybe even the entire room. Accordingly, both options show the relationship between Odaenathus' army and the Jewish community. This can be especially significant as Odaenathus' army served the Roman Empire, as the armies of a client king, and subsequently Queen Zenobia, absorbed many Roman soldiers into her army, and after Zenobia's downfall, her army was absorbed into the Roman army. If the mosaic was donated by prominent Jewish officers, it would represent one of the earliest known examples of such contributions. Additionally, it would serve as a prime example for Jews of high-ranking government, civil service and army positions donating money and mosaics to their community's synagogue. Thus, this example may highlight how men of such status could have been, and perhaps often were, proud of their Jewish lineage and took an active and prominent part in their community's daily and religious life.

The Dura-Europos Synagogue, 3rd c. CE

One of the best sites indicating extensive Jewish enlistment through the remains of a community and its synagogue is Dura-Europos, a city which was abandoned after its conquest in 256/7 CE by Shapur I, king of Persia. The town's Roman defenders fortified the city by packing the buildings near the walls with earth and rubble, thus pro-

32 Gawlikowski 2003, 318; Cussini 2024, 111.

33 Gawlikowski 2003, 318.

34 Although in the first publication, he does not define a specific religion: Gawlikowski 2003, 318; Gawlikowski 2021, 70, 187.

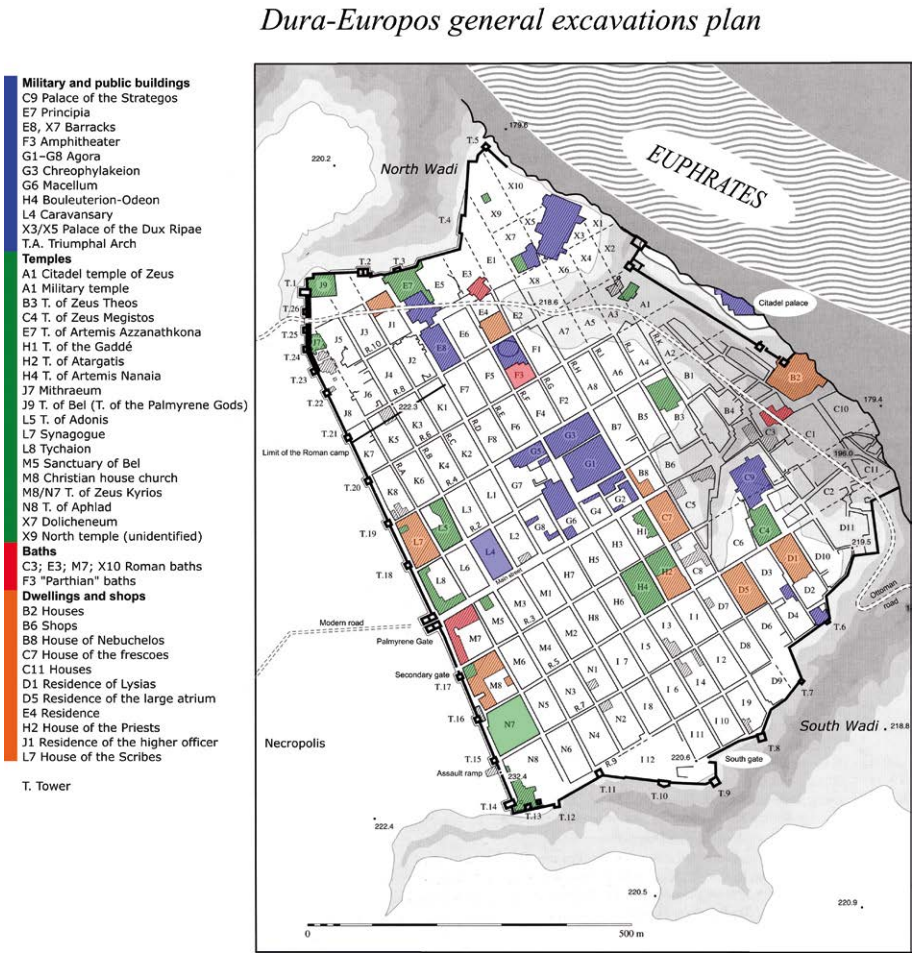

Fig. 6. A map of Dura Europos according to the archaeological excavations (©Artem.G/Wikimedia commons).

tecting them from the enemy and from the ravages of time. As a border town between the Roman and Persian Empires, the city had a considerable Roman military presence, with archaeological excavations discovering the Roman military compound comprised a quarter to a third of the city.[35] Furthermore, numerous temples dedicated to various gods and faiths were excavated, including the synagogue,[36] often identified as building L7 (fig. 6), which was located adjacent to the western wall of the city (fig. 7), two streets south of the military compound.

35 James 2019, 255–258.

36 There is extensive literature on the synagogue. The most important is: Kraeling et al. 1956.

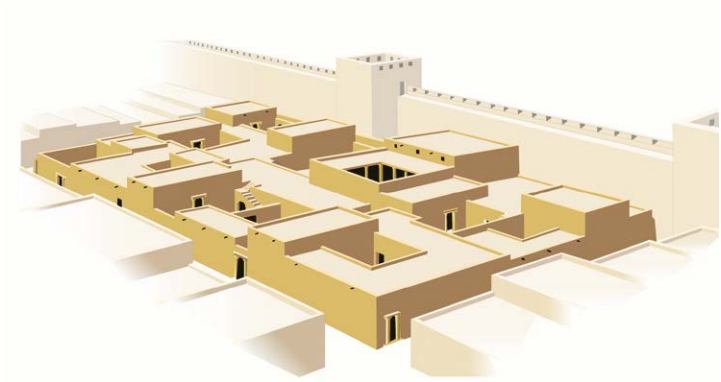

Fig. 7. Isometric view of Block L7, Dura Europos, with the Synagogue in its centre (©Marsyas/Wikimedia commons).

Since a significant part of the population was the garrison, it was proposed that the synagogue functioned as a place of worship for Jewish soldiers.[37] The argument was further elaborated when the wall paintings inside the synagogue were discussed in an even more comprehensive way.[38] These paintings purportedly depict Biblical scenes, with some figures anachronistically dressed in Roman military uniforms and equipment from the 3rd century CE (fig. 8–11). One suggestion for this phenomenon was that some members of the Jewish community, or the painter himself, served in the military.[39] Another possibility is the painter depicted Roman soldiers because they were a visible part of daily life in Dura-Europos. Yet, the proximity of the synagogue to the garrison suggests Jewish Roman soldiers, military suppliers and passing merchants (given the city's location along the ancient Silk Road), likely attended religious services in the synagogue.

Furthermore, the pervasiveness of depictions of military personnel at the Dura-Europos synagogue, coupled with the building's proximity to the Roman garrison, implies a substantial proportion of the Jewish congregation was Jewish military men serving among the units stationed in the town. This aspect is further reiterated in various military documents uncovered in this city.

Some of these documents belonged to a Roman military unit originating from Palmyra called XX Palmyrenorum which was stationed in Dura Europos. These documents contained hundreds of generally Semitic names used by Jews, such as: Aurel(ius) Salmanes,[40] Bannạ̣ei, [A]ụrel(ius) Bạ̣rnaeus, Aurel(ius)] Ḅ[a]ṛṣị[ms]us, Ṣalmeṣ Ṃạlchi,

37 Rosenfeld and Potchebutzky 2009, 195–222; in the appendix to Rocca's article, he mentioned the former: Rocca 2010, 26.

38 Regarding the wall paintings, see: Hachlili 2010; Weisman 2012; Olshanetsky 2022.

39 Weisman 2012.

40 P.Dura 122=ChLA IX 377=Rom.Mil.Rec. 32.

Fig. 8. Wall painting in the Dura-Europos synagogue, North wall, showing the right part of the depiction of the battle of Eben Ezer (Gillerman slides collection (Yale), Adapted by Marsyas, Wikimedia commons).

Fig. 9. Wall painting in the Dura-Europos synagogue, North wall, showing the left part of the depiction of the battle of Eben Ezer, in which the Ark is being taken (Gillerman slides collection (Yale), Adapted by Marsyas, Wikimedia commons).

Fig. 10. Jews cross the Red Sea pursued by Pharoah. A fresco from the Dura-Europos synagogue (©Becklectic/Wikimedia commons).

Fig. 11. Murder of the prophet, Zechariah ben Jehoiada, from the Dura-Europos synagogue (©Wikimedia commons).

ṣalṃus An[ ],[41] Malcḥụ[s Z]eḅiḍa, Seleucu[s M]ạlchi, Ṃal[c]ḥus Ṃombogei, Auṛẹ[l(ius)] Bạṛḅesomeniuṣ,[42] Goremis] Ịạḍei,[43] Iulius Salman, Thẹmarsas Salman, Zebidaṣ Ịạḍẹi.[44] However, these names are not necessarily Jewish. These names, while reminiscent of biblical Hebrew names, are universally Semitic names which could also be associated with pagan deities, a common occurrence in the region.[45] Another name found

41 P.Dura 67 =ChLA VII 322=Rom.Mil.Rec. 92=CEL I 200.

42 P.Dura 117=ChLA IX 372=Rom.Mil.Rec. 33.

43 P.Dura 103=ChLA IX 358=Rom.Mil.Rec. 26.

44 P.Dura 101=ChLA VIII 356=Rom.Mil.Rec. 2.

45 Can be found in the mentioned documents in the previous and following notes, as well as in: P.Dura 104=ChLA IX 359=Rom.Mil.Rec. 3; P.Dura 97 =ChLA VII 352=Rom.Mil.Rec. 83=CPL 325; P.Dura 66 =ChLA VI 321=Rom.Mil.Rec. 89 No. 1=CEL I 191 (1); P.Dura 82 =ChLA VII 337=Rom.Mil.Rec. 47; P.Dura 83=ChLA VII 338=Rom.Mil.Rec. 48=CPL 339; P.Dura 89=ChLA

in the military records of Dura-Europos, Aurel(ius) Maesomas Aciba,[46] one of the few soldiers named Aciba,[47] which bears similarity to that of the renowned Rabbi Akiva,[48] though it also may have been used by gentiles. On the other hand, there are names more strongly associated with Jews which are often used as definitive evidence of Jewish faith, like Iaq]ubus,[49] which was also used by at least five other soldiers.[50] Other names from the papyri, which are most probably Jewish, are Mocimus Simon,[51] Ạ[u]ṛẹ̣l(ius) Og[a]ṣ Haniṇa,[52] and another suggested Hanina: Vabalathus Hanina.[53]

The presence of Jewish soldiers in Dura-Europos is well substantiated, but assessing the size of the Jewish community is integral to gauging their influence in the region. For example, the synagogue's renovation and expansion in 245 CE, doubling its capacity to accommodate 120 male worshippers, underscores the growing influence and size of the Jewish community in Dura-Europos. Yet, beyond the formal seating, additional space on the floor or possibly wooden chairs, along with the courtyard, allowed a larger congregation to attend services. Furthermore, the synagogue was a relatively new institution during this period and, likely, most Jews did not visit one. It also remains unknown whether there were other unidentified synagogues in Dura-Europos, while it is important to remember that not all Jews were in the town at any given moment. However, it can be assumed that several hundred Jewish adult men lived in the city, with a quarter to a third possibly serving as soldiers, similar to the percentage of soldiers out of the city's general population. This raises the possibility that 10 % or more of the permanent garrison could have been Jewish, given the estimated garrison size of 1000–2000 soldiers in the late 2nd century CE.[54]

This in turn suggests that Jewish soldiers identified themselves as Jews, practiced their faith autonomously, actively participated in local Jewish community life, and maintained

VII 344=Rom.Mil.Rec. 50=CPL 331; P.Dura 95=ChLA VII 350=Rom.Mil.Rec. 66; P.Dura 102 =ChLA IX 357=Rom.Mil.Rec. 8; P.Dura 103=ChLA IX 358=Rom.Mil.Rec. 26; P.Dura 106=ChLA IX 361=Rom.Mil.Rec. 13; P.Dura 107=ChLA IX 362=Rom.Mil.Rec. 15; P.Dura 114=ChLA IX 369=Rom.Mil.Rec. 41; ChLA 7 324=P.Dura 69=Rom.Mil.Rec. 95.

46 P.Dura 100=ChLA VIII 355=Rom.Mil.Rec. 1=CPL 335; Apper also in: P.Dura 101=ChLA VIII 356=Rom.Mil.Rec. 2.

47 Acibas Bora in P.Dura 67 col. III and P.Dura 101 col XVII and P.Dura 102 col. V; Acibas Ginnaei in P.Dura 100 col. XXVII; "Acib[a .....]ni," in P.Dura 101 col. XI; "Acibas [.].[..]in[..]I," in P.Dura 101 col. I; Acibas in P.Dura 66 letter *ff*; "Aurelius Aci[bas]" in P.Dura 110 fr. *a*; Theotecnus Aciba in P.Dura 115 fr. *a* col. II;

48 On Rabbi Akiva see for example: Holtz 2017.

49 P.Dura 118=ChLA IX 373=Rom.Mil.Rec. 44.

50 Aurelius Iaqubus in P.Dura 101 col. XXIX; "[Ia]qubus L[- - -]" in P.Dura 101 col. II-IV fr. *ff*; Iaqubus Themarsa in P.Dura 100 col. XXVII; Iaqubus Zebida in P.Dura 100 col. XXXV and in P.Dura 101 col. XXXV; "[- - - iaq]ubus" in P.Dura 108 fr. *a*;

51 P.Dura 100 col. XXXV and in P.Dura 101 col. XXXV (as Mocimus Simaoni).

52 P.Dura 100 col. XL=ChLA VIII 355=Rom.Mil.Rec. 1=CPL 335; Apper also in: P.Dura 101 col. XL=ChLA VIII 356=Rom.Mil.Rec. 2.

53 P.Dura 100 col. XXXV(as "[Va]b. H.") and in P.Dura 101 col. XXXVI (as "[vabalat]hu[s H.]").

54 James 2019, 244–255.

a distinct Jewish identity. Their significant presence in the Roman military challenges and ultimately undermines the assertions made by Oppenheimer and scholars with similar viewpoints.

Cosmus Inscription, 233–235 CE

The next example that must be presented was found in Duna-Fentele, today named Dunaújváros, in modern-day Hungary in 1864. This Latin inscription (CIJ I, 677) dates to 233–235 CE, the end of Emperor Septimus Severus' reign, as noted in the inscription, which says the following:

Deo aeterno pro sal(ute) d(omini) n(ostri) Sev(eri) A[lexandri] p(ii) f(elicis) Aug(usti) et [Iul(iae) Mame]ae Aug(ustae) mat(ris) Aug(usti) vot(um) red(dit) l(ibens) Cosmus pr(aepositus) sta(tionis) Spondilla synag. I|u|de|or(um)

Patai's translation:

> "To the Eternal God! For the salvation of our Lord; the pious, felicitous Emperor Severus Alexander; and the Empress Julia Mamea, mother of the Emperor, Cosmus, chief of the Spondilla customhouse, head of the synagogue of the Jews, gladly fulfills his vow."[55]

It is implied Cosmus was the commander of the compound at Spondilla, which was either a customhouse manned by soldiers, or another kind of military station. Those who read the inscription as indicating his connection to the Jewish synagogue have suggested he was an *archisynagogos*, i. e. the head of the Jewish community, with some raising the possibility that the letter "a" at the end of the name Spondilla was erroneously inscribed, and so needs to be Spondill. In the case of such a scenario, this mistake drove the craftsman to abandon an attempt to write the first part of the title *archisynagogos*. It is important to note the letters which some suggested represented the word I|u|de|or(um) were written outside the tabula ansata.[56] The notion that Cosmus was Jewish and connected to the Jewish synagogue is quite substantiated, and there is reasonable chance he served in a military station or a customhouse run by the army. On the other hand, the inscription is a good indicator of how hard it is to be certain someone is both definitely Jewish and/or that his title is connected to the army.[57] Such issues can also be found in the following inscriptions.

55 Translation taken from: Patai 1996, 22, it was amended to Cosmus instead of Cosmius as the latter seems like a typing error in Patai's book

56 See CIJ I 677; IJO I, pp. 9–10; it is also mentioned in: Patai 1996, 22–23.

57 Unlike Schoenfeld, who unequivocally presented him as an army officer: Schoenfeld 2006, 122.

Ioses' tombstone (CIJ I, 681), Oescus, 4th–5th c. CE

The most famous example, even though it is a problematic one, of Jewish soldiers who were active members of their religious community is Ioses' tombstone, dated to the 4th century CE.[58] It was found during excavations in Oescus, a city in ancient Moesia, in today's north-western Bulgaria:

[First line missing]
IOSES ARCISINA ΓOC
ET PRINCIPALES (A during of a leaf)
FILIVS MAXIMINI
PANNONI SIBI ET
QYRIAE COIVGI
SVI VIVO SVO ME
MORIA DEDICA
(Palm frond) VIT (A drawing of a leaf)

The top of the tombstone is missing due to secondary use over the years. According to scholars, the missing top row of this inscription in Latin housed the majority of the name of the one buried. It is believed the second row, the first of the surviving rows, should be split to "Ioses arcisina". Ioses is a common semitic name which was very popular among Jews, both in Judaea/Palestina and the diaspora, usually as a shortening of the name Joseph. It was further hypothesised that because of the error of a stonemason, who miscalculated the space needed, the last letters of the second word in this line were omitted, and so instead of arcisina it should have read *archisynagogos*, i.e. the head of the Jewish community. It seems the letters SINA were written over an erasure, possibly due to an attempt at rewriting the word. The markings at the end of the word, on the frame around the inscription, possibly occurred for the same reason.

The markings are possibly the Greek letter gamma (Γ), which only earlier publications referred to, and a definitively identified circle (possibly omicron). If this suggestion is correct, it is important to note the word *archisynagogos* in the inscription is not spelt in the usual way, although stonemasons' spelling mistakes are well attested in the archaeological record. It is also of note that there was no commonly accepted way to write this Greek word in Latin. Another commonly made assumption is that the title and position of the one buried, *Principalis,* was used to describe a military position and not an administrative one. This question and theory arose because the same terms were occasionally used for both military and non-military positions in the Roman Empire. In Ioses' case, researchers' decision to prefer the military option was due to the fact that Oescus was the home of

58 This tombstone was mentioned several times. You can see it in: CIJ I, 681; and it can also be seen alongside a further debate, in: Barclay 2004, 58–60; and also: IJO, I, pp. 31–34.

the 5th Legion *Macedonia,* where educated individuals served in the position of *Principalis.* [59] Due to the above assumptions, it is better to be wary of the importance given to this inscription, yet it is still possible Ioses did indeed held this office in his Jewish community concurrently with serving in the army.[60]

Syr 5 Tzippori synagogue 4th–5th c. CE

In the church of St Anne in Tzippori, which was originally a synagogue, there is a Greek inscription dated to the 4th–5th c. CE relevant to this debate, and known in the research as Syr 5:[61]

1. <ἐπὶ> τοῦ <Γ>ελασίου σχ(ολαστικοῦ) κώ(μητος)
   λαμπ(ροτάτου) υείοῦ Ἀετίου το-
2. ῦ κό(μητος), Εἰο(ύ)δ<α> ἀρχ<ισ>υναγώγου, ΣΙδονίου
   ἀρχισυναγ-
3. ώγου, περιερθόντα <τά>δ<ε> ὑ<π>ὲρ Ἰάνο<υ>
   Ἄφρο<υ> ἀρχ<ισ>υναγ-
4. ώγο<υ> Τύρου λαμπ(ροτάτου). ΧΡ

Trans.

> "In the time(?) of Gelasius(?), scholasticus, most illustrious comes, son of Aetius the comes, of Judah the archisynagogos, (and) of Sidonius the archisynagogos – these enclosures(?) on behalf of Ianus [john?] (son of?) Aphrus, archisynagogos of Tyre the most illustrious(?)."[62]

The inscription is dated to the time of Gelasius, who was both a *scholasticus* and a *comes*, as well as the son of a different *comes* named Aetius, yet in both cases, it is impossible to determine whether this was a military or civilian role. The inscription is also dated according to the office of two *archisynagogos*, Judah and Sidonius.[63] However, caution needs to be exercised with this inscription as it is unclear what kind of *comes* Gelasius and Aetius were, as this was the title of a high-ranking official in both the civil service and the army.[64] Furthermore, the abbreviation for this term differs between the two cases (κώ and κό), further complicating matters. As they are dissimilar, it is possible one of them was not a

59 For the inscription and debate: Barclay 2004, 58–60.
60 Barclay 2004, 58–60; CIJ I, 681; Schoenfeld 2006, 122.
61 IJO.III, p. 7.
62 The chi-ro at the end was most probably added later by Christians when the synagogue was transformed into a church.
63 There is no connection between the *archisynagogos* and the comes as due to a type error of mine was implied in my 2018 article: Olshanetsky 2018b, 23–24.
64 Regarding the position of *comes*: Trebilco 1991, 48.

comes at all. Albeit, as the inscription is in Greek and the title *comes* is Latin, there is a good chance the difference in the abbreviations κώ and κό derives from an ignorance of the craftsman in not knowing which is better and/or forgetting to use the same abbreviation in both places, even though it refers to the same title.

It is important to note the title *scholasticus* was mainly used for rhetoricians and lawyers from the 4th century CE. Hence, there is a growing possibility Gelasius and Aetius were civil service *comes*, and not from the military.[65] Moreover, although the Jewish religious context is clear, and the inscription mentions the construction of a fence around a synagogue, Gelasius may only be mentioned as a dating reference, or because he participated in the ceremony of placing the cornerstone of the fence, rather than being a member of the community.[66] However, it can be questioned whether a *comes* will be mentioned as a dating tool if he is not part of the community. Furthermore, if he took part in the ceremony, would he do so if he was not Jewish, especially in a growingly Christian Empire? Accordingly, this inscription can still be used, at least alongside the other presented evidence, to show that Jews were able to reach high-ranking positions, including in the army, while still maintaining their Jewish identity and associating themselves with the local Jewish community.

Sardis' Synagogue, 5th century CE

There are other examples of Jews taking part in the religious life of their local Jewish community while holding the rank of *comes.* Yet such cases are also ambiguous in indicating whether the title refers to a military or civilian position. For example, there was a Jewish *comes* named Paulus who is mentioned in the 5th-century mosaic floor in Sardis' synagogue. The mosaic says, "The vow of Paulus the comes."[67] The inscription is dated to after the mid-4th century as two coins dated to 341–346 CE were found under the mosaic.[68] Here, unlike in the previous case, the *comes* is clearly Jewish and even well connected to his Jewish religion and community, facts that can be ascertained due to the mosaic's location. However, as mentioned, it is impossible to determine whether he was a military or civil *comes*.[69] Yet, Paulus is another good example of Jews achieving high ranks in the civil administration and the army,[70] highlighting their assimilation and integration into

65 Regarding this, and the position of comes, see: Trebilco 1991, 48.

66 Schoenfeld did not question their Jewish identity: Schoenfeld 2006, 122.

67 First published together with a photo of the mosaic: Ramage 1972, 20–22; second mention: Hanfmann et al. 1983, 171. Appears with a good dating in: Kroll 2001, 19; was mentioned in one sentence in: Gilbert 2004, 177.

68 Kroll 2001, 19.

69 Sinfield was a bit to decisive when he defined him as a Jewish officer without a doute: Schoenfeld 2006, 122.

70 The inscription was mentioned in the context of the debate regarding Jewish military service in: Mazoz 2011, 24.

Roman society. In this case, it is clear he kept his Jewish belief, even while serving, and was an active member of the Jewish community.

The synagogue in Meroth, first half 5th century CE

A floor mosaic dated to the 4th or 5th century CE was found in a synagogue in Meroth.[71] The mosaic depicts a young man in a tunic, commonly used by the Roman military at the time,[72] with a cape and a belt at the waist. Next to the figure, equipment commonly used by Roman soldiers of the period are portrayed: a shield, a long sword and a helmet.[73] Near the figure is an inscription in Aramaic, saying: "יודן בר שמעון מני" (Yodan bar Shimon ma'ny).[74] The original excavators suggested the figure in the mosaic was King David after the battle with Goliath, and the depicted equipment belonged to the fallen Goliath,[75] while the inscription was thought to be the signature of the man who constructed the mosaic or of the donor.[76] The suggestion that this was the name of anyone except the donor may have risen from past research's lack of awareness of the phenomena of Jewish soldiers. This has changed and now this mosaic is accepted as being a depiction of the donor (CIIP V 6044). Moreover, with time, some have mentioned the find as part of the debate regarding Jewish service in the Roman army.[77]

The discussion regarding this mosaic would be incomplete without at least touching upon the question of dating. It was previously claimed the synagogue was erected at the end of the 4th century or the beginning of the 5th, with some suggesting the mosaic was added between 425–475 CE,[78] because a Valentinian III (r. 425–455) coin was found under one of the two mosaic sections.[79] It was assumed that the mosaic was one and the same in the entire site, even though no physical connection was discovered due to erosion and the ravages of time. Accordingly, it should be regarded as an inaccurate date, at least a date that cannot be used for both the sections with mosaics, nor the entire site. In my opinion, while considering both the design of the helmet and the fact that Jews were excluded from military service already from the first two decades of the 5th century,[80] the mosaic may be

71 Ilan 1988, 108; Ilan 1991, 41; Ilan 1994, 262.

72 Regarding tunics that were wheared by soldiers and their design see: Olshanetsky 2021a, 63–66; Olshanetsky 2023c, 134–139.

73 Can be seen in: Hachlili 1996, 120.

74 CIIP V/1 6044; the mosaic can also be seen in: Ilan 1988, 112; Ilan 1991, 44; Hachlili 1996, 120.

75 This is the main opinion raised by Zvi Ilam who excavated the site: Ilan 1987, 29; Ilan 1988, 110; Ilan 1991, 41–42; Ilan 1994, 266–267; Hachlili 1996, 119.

76 Hachlili 1996.

77 Rocca 2010, 29.

78 Rocca is mistaken when he dates the inscription to the 6th century: Rocca 2010, 29.

79 Ilan 1994, 262.

80 There are two clauses in the *Codex Theodosianus* which ban Jewish and Samaritan military service. One clause, from 404 CE, forbids service in the *Sacer Comitatus* (*Cod. Th.* 16:8:16). The second clause, from 418 CE, forbids Jewish service in all branches of the military (*Cod. Th.* 16:8:24).

dated to the very end of the 4th century or the very beginning of the 5th century, and most probably no later than 440 CE. As only two separated sections of the mosaic floor were found, it is possible these are two different mosaics which were laid down at different dates, or that one is a late renovation of a section in the grand mosaic. It is also possible that the mosaic with the soldier and the inscription with his name was installed just after the construction of the synagogue in the late 4th century, while a coin was lost beneath a section of the mosaic during a later period of renovation. However, it is important to consider that people often want to be remembered for their deeds, even if their coreligionist cannot achieve such positions anymore, similar to Jewish WWI German army veterans when the Nazis forbade Jews from serving in the German Army. Thus, this alongside the coin found under the mosaic and the life expectancy of the time, the best dating for the mosaic and inscription is 425–440 CE.

This mosaic of a Jewish officer,[81] is one of the clearest pieces of evidence for Jewish military service within the Jewish communities and synagogues. Yodan's Jewish identity is certain due to the location of the mosaic, and according to the mosaic, he was unquestionably a soldier. This is also the clearest example of how a Jewish soldier could be proud of his Jewish heritage, retain his Jewish beliefs, and take part in Jewish community life while serving in the empire's armies.

Inscription from the Aphrodisias Synagogue, 4th or 5th century CE

Another relevant inscription located in a synagogue, and is indicative of a high ranking official of Jewish background that is well connected to his Jewish community, is the donor list from the Aphrodisias synagogue.[82] Several different dates were suggested for this inscription, from the 2nd to the 6th century.[83] However, as one of the Jews on the list, named Theodotos, was most likely a *palatinus*,[84] then the best dating for the inscription is the 4th century,[85] although it might also be the very beginning of the 5th century CE. *Palatinus* was a very high-ranking position connected to the imperial court. It seems those who held such positions had many different duties in the diplomatic, economic and military spheres. There were even military units titled *palatina*. However, it is impossible to know if some of Theodotos' roles were military or not, yet he is another great example that Jews could serve the empire in different capacities, including high-ranking ones in the civilian administration and the army, and still be proud of their Jewish descent and take active part in the daily life of their local Jewish community.

81 Rocca suggested this in his appendix. On the other hand, he was mistaken when saying that the inscription is from the 6th century, as the excavators are talking about the 5th century, and the helmet in the mosaic can even be from the 4th century: Rocca 2010, 29.

82 The inscription is mentioned in relation to Jewish military service in: Mazoz 2011, 24

83 Gilbert 2004, 169–175.

84 The name appears on the 11th line of the recto side of the inscription.

85 This is Gilbert's opinion, yet as Jews were forbidden from holding such a position only at the beginning of the 5th century, the beginning of this century is also a valid possibility: Gilbert 2004.

Litorius the *Comes*

The letter of Severus of Minorca,[86] is a very different and unique evidence for Jewish military service. It is different even when compared to other Cristian texts mentioning Jewish military service, like the writings and testimonies of Lucifer of Cagliari,[87] and Sulpitius Severus.[88] It is so different in nature as Severus of Minorca's letter is a church report on the clashes between the Christian and Jewish communities on the island, dating to February 418,[89] which led to the Jewish community converting to Christianity. The text describes divine intervention in favour of the Christian community in the form of miracles that enabled the community's triumph over the Jews. Yet, this is not the only goal of the text, and it includes pertinent and useful information on the events relevant to the current debate. Unlike past suggestions, it is now clear the text was written close to the described events, most probably by the said Severus, as there are two other texts mentioning the events, with one of them explicitly mentioning that Severus was planning to write a report on what occurred on the island. Moreover, the letter of Severus of Minorca includes information, such as exact dates which most probably only someone living during the events would have known.[90]

The text has several instances which may imply Jewish military service in the Roman armies of the time. The first is related to the deterioration of the theological debate into an armed conflict, especially in the city of Mago, modern-day Mahón, the capital of Minorca. The Christians claimed the Jews were the first to take up arms (of course Severus has no incentive to say the Christians were first to bear arms). The significant part is what he says regarding the Jews:

> "Thus, they began not only to consult their sacred books, but also to gather stakes, rocks, javelins, and all kinds of weapons into the synagogue, in order to repulse the Christians by physical force, if the situation demanded it, although our battle line was defended by the power of the Holy Spirit."[91]

While rocks and stakes are improvised weapons, javelins are not. Even though javelins can also be used for hunting, their military use was as common and may imply some of the Jews had a military background, or that at least some of their family members had as they left the javelins as heirlooms. The military option in this story is strong as the word translated as javelins is *iacula*, meaning either throwing spears, i. e. javelins, or darts. If the intended word was darts, it most probably referred to throwing darts like the *Plumbatae*, which were used by the Roman army at the time and had only known military usage. This

86 Severus letter as different split and inner numbering in the different additions. I use the numbering according to the edition: Bradbury 1996.
87 *Patrologia Latina,* 13:916.
88 Sul. Sev. *Chr.* 2:3:6.
89 Bradbury 1996, x.
90 Bradbury 1996, 9–16
91 *Letter of Severos of Minorca*, 8:5 (trans. Bradbury 1996).

type of weapon was meant to pierce armour at close range, and had no known civilian function, like for use in hunting. The soldiers of the period would carry several of them in the inner side of their shields and throw them at close range just before entering face-to-face combat. These darts replaced the throwing spears, known as *pila,* which were used by legionnaires up until the 3rd century CE. In any case, their ability to acquire, or make, javelins or darts indicates that at least some members of the Jewish community were soldiers and/or were employed in the arms industry, or at least used to be. This is an option if one assumes Severus wrote this part of his report accurately, and not as a literary figure of speech. This is true also for another part of his description of the events regarding his appeal to the Jews: "We brought books in order to instruct; you brought swords and clubs to commit murder."[92]

Similar to the previous extract, in this extract there is a description of bringing both makeshift clubs and military-grade weapons in the form of swords, a weapon only soldiers were supposed to carry. If Severus accurately depicted the events in this instance and did not merely utilise rhetorical elements, then it would be a clear indication that some of the members of the Jewish communities, or at least their forefathers, served in the army.

The weapons issue is only one of the indicators for Jewish military service in this text. The second is the reference to the *comes* Litorius.[93] Litorius' daughter, Artemisia, is referred to as the wife of Meletius, the brother of Theodorus who was the head of the Jewish community while also bearing the title and duty of the local *defensor*. Artemisia is portrayed as one of the most devoted Jews in the community who refused to convert to Christianity, even when her husband agreed to convert following the Jewish defeat and the destruction of the local synagogue.

Artemisia later converted in the story, but her struggle indicates she likely came from a devout Jewish family, which further implies her father, the *comes* Litorius, was Jewish. In the text, Litorius is described as someone "who recently governed this province and who is now said to be a Count (*comes*)."[94] Severus' description of Litorius as the governor of the province most probably refers to the position of governor of the Baliaric islands (*praeses insularum Balearum*), one of the seven governor positions mentioned in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, as part of the vicariate of Spain.[95] Such governors were also in charge of police and military units, and so should be seen as part of both the Roman civilian and military apparatuses. It is interesting that around the time of the anti-Jewish legislation in 418 CE forbidding Jews from serving in the army,[96] Jews were employed in such important high-ranking positions, including Theodorus as the local *defensor* and Litorius as governor, and later *comes*. Litorius' position is especially surprising as he was promoted to the rank of *comes* close to, or after, the anti-Jewish legislation was enforced, particularly when

92 *Letter of Severos of Minorca*, 12:9 (trans. Bradbury 1996).
93 In older versions is name was wrongly written as Lectorius: Bradbury 1996, 33.
94 Letter of Severos of Minorca, 24:2 (trans. Bradbury 1996).
95 Hunt 1982, 121.
96 *Cod. Th.* 16:8:24.

considering how *comes* was a position of trust which was usually personally appointed by the emperor.[97]

There is only one person of note named Litorius from this period, and there is reasonable chance they are the same individual. This Litorius served as a military *comes* in Gaul in 435–437, less than two decades after the events in Minorca, where one of his last roles was the command of a Hunnic cavalry force. In 439, he was promoted to *magister utriusque militia* and was the second in command of Flavius Aetius, the most senior officer in the West who eventually defeated Atilla the Hun more than a decade later. In a battle against the Visigoths in Toulouse, Litorius employed pagan fortune tellers before the battle, and acted hastily in the field. He was subsequently defeated, his forces were destroyed, and he was captured.[98]

If indeed this Litorius and Severus' Litorius are the same person, then this means he was an officer of Jewish descent who reached the highest military positions during a time when Jews were growingly alienated. The fact that it was mentioned he used fortune tellers before the battle of Toulouse may have derived from his attempt to give heart to his soldiers, many of whom were still pagan, or this was mentioned to discredit him because of his defeat. However, the question of why Prosper, or any other Christian writer, did not mention his Jewish religion or connect the defeat to his Jewish belief remains.[99] There is always the possibility he was Jewish at first, including when he was the governor of the Balearic Islands and maybe even when he was appointed as *comes*, but after his daughter converted to Christianity in Minorca, he followed suit and also converted.

To summarise, Severus' letter has one questionable allusion to Jewish military service in the form of the arms raised by the Jews, and a stronger one highlighting a member of the community of Minorca who held high-ranking positions, including military ones. Unlike other Jews with the rank of *comes,* Litorius had at least some military functions and responsibilities in all scenarios.

Discussion and Conclusions

As was shown, there are several strong examples of Jews, who were well connected to their religious identity, while serving the Roman Empire in high-ranking positions in both the army and administration. They often took an active part in the daily life of their local Jewish communities, sometimes even in leading roles during or after their service.

The series of evidence continues from the 2nd up until the early 5th century. The peak of evidence, similar to Jewish military service in general, is in the 3rd or 4th centuries. This peak is especially pronounced in the evidence presented here, and stems from several reasons. Firstly, the role and influence of the rabbis grew since the 2nd century, albeit their following

97 Hunt 1982, 118–121.

98 Bradbury 1996, 34.

99 Regarding some of the dilemmas, and especially the one where no Christian source mentioned his Jewishness, see: Bradbury 1996, 35.

was still marginal, and the main body of their texts comes from, or refers to, the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Similarly, the institute of the synagogue started to have a more substantial standing only from the 3rd century, with a peak in the number of these institutions in the 4th and 5th centuries, and most relevant evidence comes from such contexts. Moreover, Jews were forbidden from serving since the legislation of the early 5th century preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus*.

On the same note, it generally seems even anti-Roman parts of Jewish society, including in rabbinical circles, changed their tone after the Second Jewish Revolt in Judaea (131–136 CE),[100] and accepted Roman rule. Since then, and as long as the empire allowed it, the Jewish people took a growing part in the empire and its armies, greater than ever before. It seems that for the most part, the Jews and Judaism tied their future and faith with that of the empire for at least the next 300 years. Even before the Second Revolt, but especially in the following 300 years, it would have been common to see Roman soldiers, civil servants and high-ranking Roman officials and officers visiting the synagogues of the empire to pray to their one God while donating money and mosaics to these places of prayer which they often visited. In many cases, they even took leading official capacities in their local Jewish communities, a realia which must change common modern perceptions on both ancient Jews, Judaism, the Roman army, and the Roman empire as a whole, including its attitude to minorities.

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100 Regarding the war, see: Olshanetsky 2025a.

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Second-line God's servants

Groups of craftsmen in Egyptian temples during the Roman period

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(UMR 8167 Collège de France / Musée du Louvre)

Both presence and activity of craftsmen within or at least around Egyptian temples are attested since Pharaonic Egypt. At that time, the closing of the sacred space in order to conserve the purity of the Gods' realm led to the permanent settlement of craftsmen responsible for processing the raw materials delivered to the temple (Goyon 2002, 23–24). Their first task was to produce the liturgical objects as well as to practice mummification, as it can still be seen in Greco-Roman Egypt (Frankfurter 1998, 140). In Tebtynis (Fayum), the temple of Soknebtynis used for example to host those who made mummies portraits and Gods' pictures within its own walls (Rondot 2002, 35). However, the range of economic activities around and inside temples was much larger : industry, notarial work, transportation services... (Clarysse 2010, 280–281; Lippert and Schentuleit 2006, 9–14). From the end of New Kingdom, intrusions and taking over of places inside temples are more and more mentioned ; if some artisans continued to have local agreements with the clergy, some others settled informally and contingently, especially for security purposes (Haring 1997, 278–280). Their occupations may have shown more variety and exceed the range of activities traditionally hosted by temples. Such settlements could last for a long time, even after the end of the threat : besides security, the construction of production infrastructures such as furnaces or basins led these groups to remain where they used to live and work. Pottery is certainly the economic activity which left the most archeologic traces within Egyptian temples (Seton-Williams 1969, 7–9 ; Myśliwiec and Szymańska 1992, 112–114) together with glass inlay (Nenna, Picon and Vichy 2000, 107 ; Rondot 2004, 33).

In Roman Egypt, lastly, it did not seem totally unusual for craftsmen and their families to live behind the walls of some shrine, even if still attended by clergymen. An inscription dated from the very beginning of 1st century AD, found in the Delta, mentions the request of a freedman of Caesar who founded an Aphrodision (that means certainly a shrine devoted to Isis) with workshops and wanted to add a brewery for which he needed tax exemption[1]. Such an official request is likely to be linked to the administrative control and monitoring

1 I.Prose 51 (Ménélaïs, Western Delta, c. 12 AD). For a critical point a view of this edition, see Bingen 1994, 165.

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over Egyptian religious structures during early Roman period (Lewis 1983, 91–93). Given the slow decline of Egyptian official religion during Roman era, the number of abandoned temples has continuously increased (Bagnall 1988, 287–288), providing many places for craftsmen's activity, as it can still be seen in Late Antiquity (Van Minnen 2007, 212).

However, we deal here with temples in which Gods were still being served daily by priests as by a crowd of worshippers. As institutions, these temples were likely to build relationships with that craftsmen who used to live close to them—craftsmen as group, rather than as individuals. The nature of such relationships is however not always easy to define and may have impact on the organisation and internal life of craftsmen's group. Therefore, rather than discussing after many others individual artisans in Egyptian temples, we will be focusing on organised groups of artisans.

A reading of SB 16.12531

A starting point for this topic is a note about a temple in Tebtynis, written in the 1st century, perhaps in order to explain its general operating rules[2]. It begins with a precision with regard to the status of some trade groups settled near the doors, chiefly the bakers and the byssus-weavers, which are reported as independent from the temple. One of the aims of these texts is indeed to determine what falls under the responsibility of the temple (Paràssoglou 1974, 29). Here is the text :

[…]των τῶν πυλῶν ἐν αὐτῶι τῶι ἱερῶι ἰδιώτας γει-
[…] .αι βυσσουργούς τε καὶ ἀρτοκόπους καὶ ἕτερα εἴδη
[τιν]ὰ καὶ γυναικῶν· τούτων δὲ τὴν παραφυλακὴν
[..] .εναι πρὸς ἑαυτούς.

Some letters are lost on the left side, but given the small size of the lacunas and the global construction of the text in the form of an infinitive proposition, we may have a good idea about their content. Here is a proposition of completed text :

[…]των τῶν πυλῶν ἐν αὐτῶι τῶι ἱερῶι ἰδιώτας γεί-
[νεσθ]αι βυσσουργούς τε καὶ ἀρτοκόπους καὶ ἕτερα εἴδη
[τιν]ὰ καὶ γυναικῶν· τούτων δὲ τὴν παραφυλακὴν
[παρι]έναι πρὸς ἑαυτούς.

The verb παριέναι in this last lacuna differs from the proposition (ἐφίεναι) made by the editor Bastianini (1982, 484–485), followed recently by Messerer (2017, 8–9). I hold παρίημι for a better option than ἐφίημι because more used in papyri with that meaning as with the following preposition πρός.

2 SB 16.12531, 1–4 (Tebtynis, 1st cent. AD) = PSI 10.1149

Thus, the following translation may be proposed :

« (Near ?) the doors in this temple, the byssus-weavers and the bakers as well as some other kinds (of people) and their wives are independent. Their security is devolved to themselves. »

This interpretation differs from the meaning usually laid out for that abstract. I disagree with the idea put forward by Bastianini and Messerer that ἑαυτούς refer here to the pastophoroi who are mentioned only in the next paragraph, after a line break. The fact that pastophoroi – a lower degree of the Egyptian clergy (Sauneron 1998, 83) – are responsible for the security within the temple does not imply that they watch over independant craftsmen who are settled at the entrance. The line break makes it clear that the two cases are separated. It would be far more logical to construe that the temple accepts no responsability on behalf of those who live on its edge but without any official link to it. This is also a more sensible approach, given the range of activities that could take place at the temple entrance,a place where almost everything one needed could be found. (Clarysse 2010, 277). In the very beginning of the report, those who represent the temple make it clear that the craftsmen staying at the entrance of the sacred space have nothing to do with the temple itself. If it makes sense to designate these craftsmen as independent (I prefer that translation of ἰδιώτης than « laic », since such a designation cannot relate to the membership in the clergy), then it means that a different link, a dependency link to the temple, was possible and conceivable. The nature of such a dependency is the subject of the following.

Craftsmen in temples' documentation

A few documents show some trade groups working within Egyptian temples, or at least in connection with temples, during Roman era. Two kinds of trade may be mentioned : professions whose activity is only conceivable inside temples, such as hieroglyphs-engravers[3], but also more widespread professions. Among them, it is no accident to find trades whose production may be of some interest for ritual activity: weavers and other textile-workers for the priests' clothing, brewers since beer was traditionally served during Egyptian religious celebrations, food-sellers for offerings (Cenival 1972, 151)... A 2nd century dossier from Soknopaiu Nesos mentions nearly the same professions working over some decades around the temple of this village also called Dime located in the Fayum (Capron 2008, 145–146) : fullers, vegetable sellers, embalmers, as well as other fullers from the neighbouring city of Nilopolis[4]. This dossier provides an example of what a closer relationship between craftsmen and religious structures might look like. Accounts from the local temple contain payments from the just-mentioned trade groups for which it plays the role of intermediary with authorities, especially fiscal administration (16 drachmas for the local fullers, 12 for the vegetable-sellers, 16 for the embalmers and 240 for the fullers of Nilopolis who were clearly more numer-

3 P.Oxy. 7.1029 (Oxyrhynchus, 107).

4 P.David 1, col. 3, 6–11 (Soknopaiu Nesos, 2nd cent.) = SB X 10281 ; SPP XXII 183, 21–27 (Soknopaiu Nesos, 2nd cent.) ; P.Louvre I 4, 19–23 (Soknopaiu Nesos, 2nd cent.).

ous). However, there are other evidences of dependent craftsmen. Later in the same text, we can distinguish other – and much higher – payments towards the treasury of the district (nomarchy) or towards the treasury of the village, for the fees of several other activities : oil-making, possession of fishing boats, and brewery. Why are these last payments not recorded in behalf of oil-makers, fishermen and brewers?

The reason must be that these last rights are then contracted out to individual lessees and contractors, who do not form a trade group as those already mentioned. The temple as institution simply acquired the monopoly on several activities later practised by craftsmen paying a rent – the nomarchy is precisely supposed to receive the revenues from the rented public monopolies (Reiter 2004, 92). The fact that some oil producers were priests, as evidenced by demotic documents (Lippert and Schentuleit 2005, 72), does not change the fact that oil producers as a group had no practical or institutional existence. On the contrary, the fullers, embalmers, and vegetable-sellers are over the long term, as groups and even communities, linked to the temple which collects their licence fees and then pays them back to the state (Cuvigny 1986, 118). Such an arrangement hardly corresponds to the very interests of the temple which apparently acts as intermediary after having lost the right to exploit the licenses for these activities, as if a special relation had persisted between those workers and the temple (Chaufray 2023, 192). Some weavers may have had a similar relationship with the temple of Soknopaiu Nesos, as demotic documents show that the temple received a portion of their taxes (Lippert and Schentuleit 2005, 74–75).This is not quite the same situation as that of workers who were entirely devoted to the temple, such as the bakers who were responsible for baking bread for the deity (Lippert and Schentuleit 2006, 13). Fullers, especially those from Nilopolis, and vegetable sellers undoubtedly had other customers However, such accounts tell nothing about the internal life of these trade communities : Do they have elected leaders ? Did they give written rules to themselves on the model of the well-known charters from the neighbouring town of Tebtynis ? It is possible, though unprovable, that their group adopts the usual structures of professional associations whose first purpose is to support a collective and convivial life.

Craftsmen within temples' walls

Working in the shadow of a temple provides advantageous conditions for organizing a collective life as regards both religious and convivial aspects, which of course are often interwoven. Large buildings with small shrines or courtyards may be used as distinguished settings for monthly meetings, even for those who were totally independent from any temple. The most reverent craftsmen settled for the outside of temple's enclosure wall (Venticinque 2016, 106). Some 4th century graffiti have been found in the temple of Deir el Bahari on the west bank of the Nile, facing the actual city of Louxor, which show that ironsmiths from the upstream-located town of Hermonthis used to gather there – and even at the back of the temple – over decades, despite the significant distance, in order to perform what resembles an Osirian cult with the sacrifice of a donkey (Łajtar 1991). More generally, whatever may be the religious content of their meetings – and we have very few

informations about it, even in professional associations' regulations – the craftsmen of all Egypt frequently settled in temples to spend time together. An other professional association of around 20 men, probably tailors (*ēpētai*), left traces of its passage in the same temple of Deir el-Bahari in the same years than the ironsmiths (Łajtar 2006, 242–244). However, that temple was likely to be deprived of any priest at that time (Łajtar 2006, 69–76). What happens when the cratsmen used to live alongside clergymen ?

A first consequence could be the membership of some craftsmen in the clergy of their temple, at least in its lower ranks. By reason of the decreased revenues of temples during Roman period, more and more clergymen were led to practice a trade, including priests who originally had no right to do so (Bagnall 1988, 296). However, no evidence of a temple official belonging to a trade group similar to those which have been described above can be mentioned.

Craftsmen in the temple's life

For the trade groups directly linked to a religious institution, as those of Soknopaiu Nesos, the temple was more than an employer or an elegant framework for their regular meetings : it takes part, directly in their common life. Two accounts from the temple of Tebtynis (*graphai iereōn*) from the early 2nd century mention among all its expenses the price of meals (*estiatoria*) served to craftsmen[5] ; in this case weavers and vegetable sellers, two trades we are not surprised to find around temples. The remains of ritual meals in Egyptian temples have indeed revealed the presence of vegetables (Farout 2012, 58). At the very same time, the temple acts apparently as fiscal intermediary for the same weavers, following the example described in Dime[6]. The same word was used to refer to the common meal in two different documents from the city of Oxyrhynchus : the first one concerning the pastophoroi from the local shrine of Thonis[7], and the second one concerning the imperial cult[8]. As these members of the clergy used to do, weavers and vegetable sellers were likely to gather in the temple of Tebtynis itself, in which dining rooms have been identified (Rondot 2004, 150–152 ; Venticinque 2016, 107). For Egyptians of that era, eating together in the temple could not have been insignificant, since it was precisely the place where the god took his daily meal. The amounts vary considerably : 156 drachmas for the weavers, only 18 for the vegetable sellers which may reflect the size difference between the two professions. It is essential to note that 156 drachmas are not a small sum at that time : it constitutes indeed the biggest expense over the two documents. It is only conceivable if the relationship between the temple and these craftsmen is deep and stable. The temple

5 SB 26.16459, 12 and SB 26.16460, 6–7 (Tebtynis, c. 107/8). It is tempting to fill in the lacunas of SB 18.13118 frg D (Tebtynis, end of 2nd cent.) = P.Tebt. 2.598 on that model.

6 P.Tebt. 2.298, 30–33 et 65 (Tebtynis, 107/8).

7 P.Oslo 3.143, 5 (Oxyrhynchus, 1st cent. AD).

8 P.Mert. 2.73 (Oxyrhynchus, 163/4). See the correction by Vandoni 1967, 245.

of course financially benefited from its patronage over skilled craftsmen, but reallocated part of the received incomes for the benefit of the same craftsmen.

Beyond these table companionship moments, weavers and vegetable sellers might also have been involved as a community in some aspects of the religious life of the place where they used to work, but we lack direct evidence. All texts issued by temples in which craftsmen are mentioned contain payments for processions but it cannot be asserted that those contributing craftsmen used to follow these processions. These trade groups act as ordinary associations whose internal life is yet based on a special link with temple, making them new servants of the God worhipped in this very shrine. The papyrological documentation on that topic shows thus the flexibility of both religious institutions and professional associations which adjust to the presence of each other.

Were these craftsmen acting in the service of the Gods ? The documents through which their activity for and inside temples may be studied do not make this idea particularly relevant at first glance, since they are never associated with liturgical tasks. At that time,the distinction between the clergy and the laity was very clear (Clarysse 2010, 277). At least, the craftsmen obviously belong to the crowd of the faithful people who is committed to the local cult and participates in a few religious ceremonies under the authority of permanent priests (Lewis 1983, 91 ; Bagnall 1988, 294–295). However, if the Soknopaiou Nesos dossier is held to be significant, one may assume that the craftsmen with whom some temples used to keep special relationships were not just any craftsmen, but those who were able to provide the goods needed by the divine service and the clergy. Even if both the legal nature and the scope of such relationships has significantely evolved since pre-Ptolemaic and Ptolemaic times, the temples in Roman Egypt tried sometimes hardly to stay self-sufficient in the service of the Gods. The meals offered to these craftsmen in Tebtynis show how they were officially brought into the sphere of Gods' servants.

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Signifying Networks: Social Contexts of Meaning in Jewish Epigraphy of Late Roman Palestine

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Jewish epigraphy from late Roman Palestine, roughly between the fourth and eighth centuries of the Common Era, identified and commemorated individuals by situating them within webs of relationships. These webs could include names, family relations, places of birth, places of residence, and honorific or civic titles. Commemoration often happened in multiple languages, creating the situation of linguistic cross-pollination and code-switching. The result was a range of signifiers through which and in relation to which a donor commemorated in a synagogue inscription could be meaningfully evoked, identified, and remembered.

Consider inscriptions from a late antique synagogue in Hammat Gader, a Galilean spa town famous for its hot springs and, consequently, baths.[1] The synagogue was likely built in the fifth century and then continued to function until the seventh century. Its mosaic floor features a series of donor inscriptions, all of them in Aramaic. The inscription placed prominently in the center of the mosaic's first panel in front of the Ark of the Law commemorates "Kyris Hoples, and Kyra Protone, and Kyris Sallustius his son-in-law, and Comes Phroros his son and Kyris Photios his son-in-law, and Kyris Haninah his son–they and their children–whose acts of charity are constant everywhere."[2] While composed in Aramaic and in line with Aramaic epigraphic norms, the text simultaneously inhabits the universe of Greek social markers. Most of the names listed in it are Aramaic transliterations of Greek names, a reflection of the widespread epigraphic practice of transcribing names of Greek and Latin origin in Aramaic script and vice versa.[3] The titles of *kyris/kyra* (broadly corresponding to *sir/lady*) are Aramaic transliterations of Greek honorific addresses.[4] Finally, one of the donors is remembered as *comes*, an honorific title which may indicate that person's service in local imperial administration. The inscription commem-

1 See Sukenik 1935, 19–21.
2 Sukenik 1935, 41; Naveh 1978, no. 32.
3 See Lapin 1999, 259.
4 Lapin 1999, 251, n. 33, and 253, n. 41–42.

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orates several members of one extended family, identified by their family ties and through a series of signifiers that situate the members of the family in relation to the system of Greek and, perhaps, imperial honorific conventions.

In addition to identifying a person in relation to his/her family and honorific titles, Hammat Gader's inscriptions also describe donors in relation to their place of birth and/or residence. Villages across Roman Syria, Fergus Millar reminds us, "may often have been the main social units by which people identified themselves."[5] Synagogue inscriptions support this impression to a degree, although families in these inscriptions seem to play a more central role as the primary means of identification. Some of the donors from Hammat Gader are described in relation to both their family and the place they hail from. These include Kyris Patricius of Kefar 'Aqabyah, as well as Yose, the son of Dositheus, from Capernaum.[6] In addition to named individuals, identified by their belonging to a particular geographic locale, the inscriptions feature group names of anonymous donors derived from the names of their hometowns. The same inscription that mentions Kyris Patricius and Yose, the son of Dositheus, also contains a reference to "the Arbelites who gave their woven fabrics."[7] The adjacent inscription commemorates a somewhat mysterious group called *'iraya*, most likely another derivative from a place name.[8] The names of hometowns, in other words, constitute another set of codes and a further vector by which individuals and groups could be described in the setting of late antique synagogues. In the case of Hammat Gader this particular vector could be especially meaningful since many people who resided in this resort town were outsiders of some (but not necessarily excessive) means.

Multilingualism

Greek was the most common liturgical and epigraphic language used in Jewish communities across the Mediterranean in late antiquity. The situation in the Palestinian provinces, however, was more complex. In the words of Catherine Hezser, "even though not every Jew who lived in Roman Palestine will have been bilingual or even multilingual, the Jewish community as a whole can be defined as such."[9] Aramaic and Greek dominated the scene, although their distribution across communities and social classes was uneven. Judging by synagogue inscriptions, the currency of the two languages varied across a range of urban and rural Jewish communities. Some communities used exclusively Greek for epigraphic purposes. Other communities only used Aramaic (sometimes

5 Millar 1993, 250.
6 Sukenik 1935, 48; Naveh 1978, no. 33.
7 Sukenik 1935, 48; Naveh 1978, no. 33.
8 Sukenik 1935, 53; Naveh 1978, no. 34. See also Schwartz 2001, 275, n. 2.
9 See Hezser 2001, 243, and more broadly, 227–47.

intermingled with Hebrew). Overall, Aramaic texts constitute the highest percentage of synagogue inscriptions, followed by Greek and, the distant third, Hebrew.[10]

The combination of languages chosen by a particular family for use in inscriptions could reflect a range of considerations such as the symbolic value of language and status-related issues.[11] Many inscriptions are monolingual. However, as we have observed in the case of Hammat Gader, even a seemingly monolingual Aramaic inscription could contain loan words such as *kyris/kyra* or *comes*, as well as Greek personal names rendered in Aramaic idiom. In other cases, the same family would create inscriptions in both Aramaic and Greek. The choice to articulate oneself in multiple languages by necessity entailed the choice to use multiple symbolic systems and implied readiness to negotiate among the systems. The multitude of linguistic codes and the resulting need to routinely engage in the process of code-switching were important characteristics of Jewish communities in late Roman Palestine. Rather than being distinct corpora, separated – to appropriate Ramsay MacMullen's useful terminology – by language and epigraphic habit, Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew inscriptions function as layers of codes through which bi- or trilingual synagogue communities articulated themselves.[12] In what follows, I will explore some of the ways in which multilingual inscriptions could function as alternating communication codes within the broader framework of a synagogue's symbolic space and, to use Seth Schwartz's language, "mark the inscribers' participation in a loosely constituted but broadly shared set of social and cultural assumptions."[13]

The fourth-century synagogue discovered at Hammat Tiberias, the area of the hot springs to the south of Tiberias and another spa town, features a range of Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew inscriptions, most of them commemorative in nature. The bilingual Greek and Aramaic inscription on the *tabula ansata* in one of the synagogue's eastern aisles consists of an upper Greek half and a lower Aramaic half. The inscription reads as follows:

Greek: Severos, *threptos* of the most illustrious patriarchs, completed [it].
Blessings on him and on Ioullos the supervisor.

Aramaic: May peace be upon anyone who has done the good deed in this
holy place; and anyone who will do the good deed,
may he be blessed. Amen, Amen, Selah, and for myself Amen.[14]

The two parts of the inscription were likely laid out at the same time, recorded the same benefaction, and were meant to be read as part of a single commemorative statement hon-

10 Hezser 2001, 399.
11 See Lapin 1999, 246; Smelik 2010, 135–37.
12 See MacMullen 1982, 233–46. On the multitude of linguistic codes as a characteristic of Jewish written culture in Roman Palestine, see Fraade 2012, 15*-39*.
13 Schwartz 2001, 281.
14 Dothan 1983, 60 (Greek), and 53 (Aramaic). Trans. Dothan, with revisions.

oring the donor Severos.[15] If so, either Severos himself or the community considered it necessary to commemorate his donation in two different linguistic systems. In the words of James N. Adams, originally written in connection with Greek and Latin bilingual inscriptions at Delos, "one of the main functions of a bilingual inscription was not so much to convey information to the maximum number of readers, but to project some sort of identity."[16] Code-switching was an important aspect of Severos' epigraphic identity and the way in which his persona was meant to be evoked and remembered by the congregation. The bilingual inscription also implies that code-switching was a reading technique expected from the inscription's audience. The ability to negotiate among multiple linguistic codes and associated literary habits was, in other words, an important element in the congregation's self-representation.

Some of the elements within the inscription are clearly reserved for the Greek portion of the text. These include titles of the main benefactor, Severos, who is described as "*threptos* of the most illustrious Patriarchs (*ton lamprotaton patriarchon*)" and Ioullos the supervisor (*pronoetes*). Both titles belong within the Greek nomenclature, just as do other titles that appear in dedications in the synagogue.[17] There is no attempt to translate these titles into Aramaic. In contrast to the Greek part of the inscription, its Aramaic section remains programmatically anonymous. It addresses a group, as opposed to individuals, and helps situate the individuals named in the inscription's Greek section in relation to the timeless community of those who have done or will do "the good deed (*mitzvatah*) in this holy place (*'atrah kadishah*)." Both texts are invocations intended to draw blessings upon donors, but they do so in two different idioms. Whereas the commemoration in Greek defines donors in relation to civic and honorific norms associated with the late antique Mediterranean city, the Aramaic formula imagines donors in relation to an alternative, if complementary, set of linguistic and symbolic markers, such as *mitzvatah* and *'atrah kadishah*. From this angle, the argument that the two epigraphic habits allowed the same person in the same inscription to express himself "in dramatically different ways in Greek and Aramaic" makes a great deal of sense.[18]

The relationship between the inscription's two parts, however, is more complex than that. In addition to reserving some of their messages exclusively to a particular language, the inscription communicates other messages in *both* Greek and Aramaic thus allowing for semantic cross-pollination between the idioms. In his analysis of a bilingual Greek-Aramaic tombstone inscription from the town of Zoar in present-day Jordan, Steven Fraade notes that each part of the inscription "reflects distinctive epigraphic conventions, while they mirror one another in content and function."[19] The same can be argued for bilingual

15 See Price and Misgav 2006, 478.

16 See Adams 2002, 126.

17 Dothan 1983, 54–62; Lapin 1999, 247, n. 22, and 253–54, n. 42; Hezser 2001, 405. On the range of meanings associated with *threptos*, see Ricl 2009, 93–114.

18 Price and Misgav 2006, 479; cf. Fraade 2012, 31*-33*; Hezser 2001, 402–403, for a different interpretation.

19 Fraade 2012, 27*.

inscriptions from Hammat Tiberias. There too, the same content could be articulated multiple times in various language systems. It was the repetition of the same function in alternating codes, rather than the communication of new content that was deemed important.

Another Greek text from the synagogue's eastern aisles reads as follows: "May be remembered for good and for a blessing. Profoturos the Elder constructed this aisle of this holy place. Blessing upon him. Amen. Shalom."[20] Written in Greek with Hebrew *shalom* as the conclusion, the inscription participates simultaneously in Greek and Aramaic epigraphic habits. The opening formula of "may be remembered for good and for a blessing" (*mnesthe eis agathon kai eis eulogian*) represents a Greek version of the Aramaic *dekir le-tab*, known from multiple graffiti and synagogue inscriptions, a handful of Christian inscriptions, and somewhat earlier Aramaic votive inscriptions from polytheistic temples at Hatra, in Mesopotamia.[21] Whether the Aramaic or the Greek version of the formula is original is of secondary importance for the purpose of the present discussion. What really matters is that the congregation in Hammat Tiberias articulated itself through structurally reversible codes that allowed for reading in both Greek and Aramaic.

The same applies to the use of the term "this holy place" (*tou hagiou topou*) to describe the synagogue in the Greek inscription, an exact rendering of the Aramaic *dehaden 'atrah kadishah* that appears in the Aramaic-Greek bilingual inscription discussed above. The concluding phrase, "Blessing upon him. Amen" (*eulogia auto amen*) in the Greek inscription corresponds almost exactly to the "may he be blessed. Amen, Amen, Selah" in the Aramaic section of the bilingual text. Indeed, the *eulogia auto* formula also appears in the inscription's Greek portion, so that the blessing is invoked in both Greek and Aramaic idioms.[22] In a similar manner, the formulaic structure of Greek and Latin inscriptions from Delos analyzed by Adams was characterized, among other things, by the uses of "Greek morphology in a Latin text (*Aprodisiu*), a Greek syntactic structure of formal epigraphy transferred into Latin (the accusative of the honorand), and a Latin pattern of filiation adopted in Greek, not only by Romans but also by Greeks."[23] The result at Delos as well as Hammat Tiberias was a series of epigraphic cross-language formulas that could be read "in both directions" semantically as well as syntactically.

In other instances, the interplay between Greek and Aramaic is more subtle. The Aramaic "anyone who has done the good deed" should probably be read in dialogue with the Greek *eteliosen*, "completed [it]," used to describe Severos' benefaction in the upper portion of the inscription. In a Greek inscription found in the center of the northern panel of the nave, Severos' benefaction is commemorated by the different term *epoiesen*, "fulfilled [it]." A variation of this phrase, "X (the name of the donor) vowing fulfilled [it]" appears on several other inscriptions commemorating individual donors and surround-

20 Dothan 1983, 61.

21 Dothan 1983, 61; Price and Misgav 2006, 475; Lapin 1999, 253, n. 40; Schwartz 2001, 282–83. See Stern 2018, 46–52, for some of the formula's functions.

22 See Lapin 1999, 263, n. 80.

23 Adams 2002, 126; cf. Fraade 2012, 27*.

ing Severos' inscription in the nave.[24] The Aramaic reference to "anyone who does the good deed" must be understood in this context as another reference to a donor fulfilling his pledge. The two Greek and one Aramaic phrase serve to articulate the same basic concept of euergetism in three different idioms. The result is a range of nuances that can only be created when the same concept is rendered multiple times and in a variety of codes, both linguistic and semantic.

Epigraphical Rabbis Revisited

Like words in a language, individual terms and categories are signs largely empty of innate meaning. They become fully legible only in relation to other signs within the semiotic system in which they appear. Different systems often produce different meanings, even when they ostensibly use the same terminology. As Ferdinand de Saussure puts it, a word "is studied in the context of a system" and, therefore, "it exists only in virtue of its relation and opposition to words associated with it" within the system's parameters.[25]

The term "rabbi" offers a helpful, if somewhat belabored, example. In his article on inscriptions mentioning "rabbis" (the so-called "epigraphical rabbis"), Shaye J. D. Cohen has famously argued that the range of meanings associated with the term "rabbi" in epitaphs and synagogue inscriptions should not be delineated based on the range of meanings associated with the same term in rabbinic literature. In Cohen's words, we should "allow the epigraphical evidence to speak for itself and not impose upon it ideas derived from literary sources."[26] Instead of interpreting the "epigraphical rabbis" as members of a group of traditionalist scholars, as is the case with the use of the title "rabbi" in rabbinic texts, Cohen opts for a much broader understanding of "the word *rab* and its forms to designate individuals of rank."[27] That rank could be based on one's mastery of tradition but also on one's socioeconomic standing or other criteria.

In the wake of Cohen's article scholars offered different solutions to the problem. While some have embraced Cohen's argument to various degrees, others remain open to identifying the epigraphical rabbis with those in rabbinic literature.[28] Fergus Millar states an alternative to Cohen's approach most succinctly: "None of these arguments, however, comes anywhere near to disturbing the basic empirical principle that, if the same term is used in different sources relating to the same society, it should be assumed to have the same meaning unless there are clear reasons to think differently."[29] The value of Cohen's argument, however, lies precisely in calling into question the apparent and yet misleading simplicity of what we consider to be "the same term." In the world of multilingual com-

24 Dothan 1983, 55–56.
25 De Saussure 1986, 22–23.
26 Cohen 1981, 16.
27 Cohen 1981, 9.
28 See Hezser 1997, 119–23; Lapin 2011, 311–46, esp. 317; Millar 2011, 253–77; Miller 2006, 427–45.
29 Millar 2011, 262.

munities articulating themselves through a polyvalent range of codes, *sameness* is a tricky category. The fundamental issue identified by Cohen remains valid: We can no longer simply assume that an idiosyncratic application of the title "Rabbi" in rabbinic literature offers a universal key for interpreting this term across sources, genres, systems, and epigraphic and literary habits.[30]

A commemorative text from the synagogue at Hammat Gader illustrates the complexity of determining the range of meanings associated with title "rabbi" in epigraphic sources. Two inscriptions appear side by side on the nave floor slightly below the inscription discussed earlier in the article. Although separated by a line, the inscriptions are enclosed within a single *tabula ansata*. The relevant section of the right-hand inscription reads as follows:

> And be remembered for good Rab Tanhum the Levite, the son of Halipha, who has donated one tremissis; and be remembered for good Monikos of Susitha, the Sepphorite; and Kyris Patricius, of Kefar 'Aqabyah, and Yose, the son of Dositheus, of Capernaum, who have, all three, donated three scruples.[31]

The inscription identifies Rab Tanhum as a Levite and the son of Halipha, who is otherwise unknown to us. The system of identity markers used to describe Rab Tanhum is, therefore, similar to the one used in the earlier inscription from Hammat Gader: In both cases, individuals are described in relation to their families. This is slightly different from how our inscription identifies Monikos of Susitha, the Sepphorite, Kyros Patricius of Kefar 'Aqabyah, and Yose, the son of Dositheus, of Capernaum, by their places of origin.

As demonstrated by Stuart Miller, in Palestinian rabbinic literature, the title *rab* usually designates an expert in rabbinic tradition, just as the title *rabbi* does.[32] It remains a question, however, whether this usage can be universally applied across our sources. Does the semantic range associated with *rab* in rabbinic texts reflect a common understanding of the term, or rather the term's metamorphosis in the idiosyncratic jargon of a unique social group? It seems prudent to determine the range of meanings associated with *rab* in Hammat Gader by examining the title in relation to the language of Hammat Gader's inscriptions and, more broadly, in relation to contemporaneous epigraphic linguistic norms. This would be similar to how we determine the meaning of *rab* in literary sources by situating the title in relation to its immediate contexts. Negotiating between the two sets of norms should be approached as an act of translation rife with uncertainties rather than a straightforward transference from one system to another.

When considered in the context of other inscriptions set up in the same synagogue, the meaning of *rab* is ambiguous. Other titles are honorific in nature, serving as markers of one's social status. The Greek *kyris/kyra* is the most common of these, appearing eight times in three inscriptions. It is usually followed, with a single exception, by Greek and/or Latin personal names transcribed in Aramaic script. The title *comes* could also be hon-

30 For a similar argument, cf. Lapin 2011, 317.
31 Sukenik 1935, 48; Naveh 1978, no. 33; trans. Sukenik, 48, with minor revisions.
32 See Miller 2006, 431–33.

orific in nature and probably served to mark the donor's high social status. In turn, Rab Tanhum the Levite, the son of Halipha, is described through an alternative set of social markers as both *rab* and *levi*. Of the two terms, at least one, *levi*, is a family-based marker indicating that its bearer comes from a Levitical family. What we find here is another instance of inscriptions negotiating among sets of codes, when the audience is expected to identify donors in relation to multiple, although not mutually exclusive, systems of signification. In this instance, the two systems are constructed around Greek and Hebrew/Aramaic markers of personal and family status. Rather than referencing a learned individual, as in the range of meanings delineated by rabbinic literature, the title *rab* appears to indicate the person's social standing, just as *kyros* and *kyra* do.

The inscriptions from Hammat Gader are not the only instance in which a form of *rabbi* and a form of *kyris/kyra* appear together as complementary and possibly interchangeable sets of markers. Some of the epitaphs from the necropolis at Bet She'arim use the two to identify members of the same family. In room XXI of catacomb 20, for instance, three sarcophagi apparently contain the remains of a rabbinic family.[33] The Hebrew inscription on one of them mentions "Rabbi Joshua the [word missing]." The other two sarcophagi belonged to "[name missing] the daughter of Rabbi Joshua," and "Kyra Mega, the wife of Rabbi Joshua, son of Levi."[34] Room XI in the same catacomb, in addition to eight anonymous sarcophagi (some of them visually elaborate and featuring Greco-Roman motifs), contains two graves with inscriptions next to them.[35] One partially illegible inscription refers to "Kyra Domna," while another mentions "Miriam, the daughter of Rabbi Jonathan with her two daughters."[36] We do not know whether "Kyra Domna" and Miriam were related, although this is certainly possible. In all these cases, however, *rabbi* appears in conjunction with, and hence in relationship to, the honorific appellation *kyra*. In contrast to inscriptions from Hammat Gader, no male form of *kyra*, that is, *kyris*, appears in catacomb 20. One gets the impression, therefore, that *rabbi* serves as a marker which substitutes for *kyris* in referencing males buried in the catacomb.

A Hebrew inscription from the early Byzantine synagogue at Khirbet Susiya, a town south of Hebron, offers another example of family as a relational model that endows nomenclature with potentially new meaning:

> Be remembered for good the holiness of [or "his holiness"] my lord Rabbi Issi the honorable priest Berabbi who has made this mosaic and plastered its [synagogue's]

33 See Avigad 1973, 109, and 247–51. On the chronology of burials at Bet She'arim, see Lapin 2011, 321.

34 Avigad 1973, 248–50.

35 Avigad 1973, 104–105. On the sarcophagi, such as the "eagle" sarcophagus and the "tabula-ansata" sarcophagi, see Avigad 1973, 141–42, and 156–57. It is possible, however, that some of these sarcophagi did not originally belong in this room.

36 Avigad 1973, 245–47. Avigad refers to a couple of Second Temple parallels to this burial of mother and her children.

> walls with plaster, [for] that was donated at the [marriage?] feast of Rabbi Yohanan the priest the scribe Berabbi his son. Peace upon Israel. Amen.[37]

Like *rab*, the title *berabbi* is difficult. Both titles represent variations on *rabbi*. Both are attested in Palestinian rabbinic literature, although neither is particularly common. In addition, *berabbi* appears with some frequency in Palestinian Jewish epigraphy – in synagogue inscriptions as well as epitaphs. A series of interpretations have been offered for the term, ranging from a particularly knowledgeable rabbi to an honorary title to an offspring of a rabbinic dynasty.[38] None of them is certain. The situation illustrates the limits of Millar's "basic empirical principle that, if the same term is used in different sources relating to the same society, it should be assumed to have the same meaning."[39] Are *rabbi*, *rab*, and *berabbi* of rabbinic literature, on the one hand, and "a bewildering variety of forms" in which *rabbi* appears in Jewish epigraphy, on the other, indeed the same term?[40] Do they relate to the same society? In inscriptions and literature, these titles accrue meaning by being situated within different clusters of relationships. Since, in the words of Saussure, "a language is a system in which all the elements fit together, and in which the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others," the value of *rab* and *berabbi* in inscriptions is not necessarily the same as the value of *rab* and *berabbi* in literary sources.[41]

In Khirbet Susiya's inscription, the titles *berabbi* and *rabbi* appear in conjuncture with one another. Both the father and the son are styled as *rabbi* so-and-so the priest (either "the honorable priest," in the case of the father, or "the priest the scribe," in the case of the son) *berabbi*. The semantic relationship between *rabbi* and *berabbi* is unclear. The titles bracket a series of honorific appellations such as "my lord" (*mari*) and "the honorable priest" (*ha-kohen ha-mekhubad*). At least one term, however, "the scribe" (*ha-sofer*), seems to indicate the person's professional occupation. Finally, within the inscription's family-centered structure, the title *rabbi/berabbi* is a hereditary one, since both the father and the son have it, just as both are priests. In a similar manner, in burials at Bet She'arim, *rabbi* is a title which tends to be passed down between generations of the same family. The most striking example of this comes from the reference to one "[Rabbi] Gamaliel the son of Rabbi Eliezer ... seventeen years of age."[42] It is highly unlikely that his title reflects the deceased's own achievements. Rather, the title seems to be reflective of his family's status in society.

Equally uncertain is the meaning of the reference to "the sanctity of my master and rabbi Isai" (so Gutman's translation), "the holiness of my lord Rabbi Issi" (so Hezser), or

37 Naveh 1978, no. 75; trans. Hezser 2001, 404, with minor revisions. On the synagogue, see Gutman 1982, 123–28.

38 See Miller 1999, 62; and 2006, 443–44, with literature. Cf. Gutman 1982, 128; Lapin 2011, 317.

39 Millar 2011, 262.

40 See Cohen 1981, 7–8.

41 De Saussure 1986, 113.

42 Avigad 1973, 250–51. Avigad reconstructs the missing word before "seventeen years of age" as "who died." But the reconstruction, although highly plausible, has its problems. See further, Miller 2006, 434, n. 121; Lapin 2011, 315–16, and 322.

"his holiness, my lord, my master Issi" (so Lapin) (*qedushat mari rabbi Issi/Isai*).[43] The uncertainty of translation reflects a broader ambiguity surrounding the term. Miller offers a thorough examination of the word *qadosh*, which describes both individuals and institutions in rabbinic literature.[44] Once again, however, it is unclear whether the rabbinic usage of *qadosh* can be automatically transferred to elucidate the meaning of the term in inscriptions.

In roughly contemporaneous Christian epigraphy, the designation "the most holy" (*hagiotatos*) is frequently used as an honorific epithet attached to the office of bishop or archbishop; but whether this constitutes a valid parallel to the case of Rabbi Issi is hard to tell.[45] At the same time, Jewish epitaphs from Bet She'arim refer to those commemorated as "holy" or "pious" ones on more than one occasion. The references can appear both in Hebrew and (more frequently) in Greek. A Hebrew inscription from catacomb 20 states that "these sarcophagi, the inner and the outer, belong to Rabbi Aniana and to [the names are missing] the holy ones (*ha-qedoshim*), the sons of [the name is missing]."[46] A Greek inscription at the eastern entrance corridor to the same catacomb exclaims: "Be of good courage, holy/pious parents (*pateres hosioi*). No one is immortal."[47] Greek epitaphs across the necropolis apply the designation *hosios/hosia* to both men and women.[48]

The "holiness" implied by these inscriptions is very different in nature from the "holiness" attached as an epithet to the office of bishop or archbishop in church inscriptions. In Bet She'arim, the term seems to indicate familial piety, possibly, akin in meaning to the virtue (*sanctitas*) of one's *domus*, a dominant family value in Roman society.[49] As noted by Karen Stern, "*hosios* is a term more commonly used in inscriptions to praise the dead, rather than to describe the living."[50] It also seems likely that the Hebrew *qedoshim* used in reference to the relatives of Rabbi Aiana and the Greek *hosios/hosia/hosioi* used repeatedly in neighboring burials might share a common semantic field. It must remain an open question, however, whether any of these references to "holiness" are the same as in the case of Rabbi Issi from Khirbet Susiya. Sometimes our investigation will have to result in a range of meanings that a word inhabits rather than the specific meaning of the word.

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43 See Gutman 1982, 128; Hezser 2001, 404; Lapin 1999, 254, n. 42. Lapin follows the usage attested in several places in the Jerusalem Talmud. See Jastrow 1992, 1314; Naveh 1978, 116.

44 Miller 2006, 433–35.

45 See Ovadiah 1987, nos. 3, 7, 72, 93, 100, and 138. Lapin 1999, 265, notes that the commemoration of R. Issi offers the closest Jewish parallel to "the most holy" formula of Christian inscriptions. He also notes important differences between the two.

46 Avigad 1973, 101, and 243–44.

47 See Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974, no. 193. I agree with the editors' translation of *pateres* as "parents," rather than "fathers" or "forbearers." See Stern 2018, 212, n. 28, for a similar observation. Cf., however, Avigad 1973, 95, who translates *pateres hosioi* as "holy fathers."

48 See Schwabe and Lifshitz 1974, nos. 35, 126, 163, 173, 193 (men), and no. 34 (a woman). Cf. nos. 176 and 183 for the appellation *makaria* ("blessed") applied to women. See also Miller 2006, 435; Lapin 1999, 251, n. 33, and 253, n. 41.

49 See Saller 1994, 94.

50 Stern 2018, 113.

It is precisely these ranges of meaning that the signifying network of inscriptions and epitaphs can generate.

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Reconsidering the Assyrian King's Priestly Role and Ritual Performance

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Abstract:
This article deals with the priestly role and ritual performance of the Assyrian king. The study traces to what extent and in what context such activities of the king are attested in the sources, as well as how the priesthood of the Assyrian ruler was conceived. The study focuses on the ritual activities of the Assyrian king, the circumstances under which they were performed with the active role of the king, and the actions of the king that they involved. The chronological scope is the Neo-Assyrian period.

Key words: Neo-Assyrian Empire, kingship, priesthood, ritual

The present article discusses the priestly role and ritual performance of the Assyrian king.[1] The study traces to what extent and in what context such activities of the king are attested in the sources, as well as how the priesthood of the Assyrian ruler was conceived. The study focuses on the ritual activities performed by the Assyrian king, under what circumstances they were carried out with the active role of the king and what steps they included. The chronological scope is the Neo-Assyrian period. Textual as well as iconographic sources will be presented and analysed. Royal inscriptions and ritual texts are included in the first group. The iconographic group comprises the scenes on the palace and residential reliefs. Regarding the visual narratives, some specific attributes held by

1 The topic is also studied by S. Parpola (2022), as well as other authors whose work will be discussed below. I devoted a chapter on the role of the king as a priest in the early Neo-Assyrian period, see Tarhan 2022, 228–240; Tarhan 2025, 178–187. This article traces the Assyrian king's priestly role within the entire Neo-Assyrian period and gives additional insights. The basic research on this topic was conducted as part of my project "Royal Rituals and Cultic Festivals in the Neo-Assyrian Empire" funded by the national programme "Early Career Scholars and Postdoctoral Researchers – 2", Ministry of Education and Science (Republic of Bulgaria) from October 2022 until October 2023. On the topic of the king's relationship with the gods, as well as the different points of view on his priesthood, see Karlsson 2016, 93–103; Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 202–218.

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the royal officials during the ritual activities (and in the presence of the king) will be discussed. I will link those objects to ritual texts, attempting to understand their function and identify them with specific terms used in the textual sources.

The King as a Priest in the Royal Inscriptions

In the Middle Assyrian period, the ruler was already defined as a priest (*šangû*), and his priesthood (*šangûtu*) was also discussed. The reference to the king's role as priest first occurred during the reign of Adad-nērārī I, which was expressed in Akkadian in his inscriptions through syllabic writing, and later from the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I, the position was written using the Sumerogram SANGA.[2] This line of the kingship, which focused on the priestly role of the king, was not an alien element to the kings of the Neo-Assyrian period. The priestly role of the king was presented in varying degrees in the texts of the early and late Neo-Assyrian rulers.

In the royal inscriptions, especially those of the display type or in display texts of the mixed type, the Assyrian kings stressed their direct connection with the gods, sharing various examples of communication with the gods in different situations. Of particular importance, however, is the belief that the Assyrian king was chosen by the gods to rule and lead his people. One of the many examples is the following excerpt from the first lines of an inscription of Aššur-dān II, registered on a fragmented clay tablet from Aššur:

> [*Aššur-dān*], *strong* [*king*], *king of the universe, king of land Aššur/Assyria, designate of Aššur,* [*whose*] *name Aššur called* [*... from*] *ancient time, into whose grasp* (*Aššur*) *placed* (*the sceptre and*) *the exalted crown,* [*whom Aššur ...*] *grandly established* [*for sovereignty over*] *the land Aššur/Assyria*.[3]

This passage clearly illustrates the understanding that the Assyrian king was the chosen one of the gods. A special stress is laid on the supreme Assyrian god Aššur, who personally crowned and ratified the king's authority. In the context of these relations, there was no one more appropriate and trustworthy than the Assyrian king to revere the gods and to carry

2 B. Pongratz-Leisten states in her book about ideology and religion in Assyria that the title of *šangû* was first attested under Aššur-uballiṭ I, without referring to the source itself. See, Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 203, fn. 24. However, in the royal inscriptions of Aššur-uballiṭ I there is no such mention of the king as a priest. In fact, cuneiform signs are polyvalent. Her statement is based on a wrong interpretation of the cuneiform sign 𒀭𒈪 which could be interpreted as the Sumerogram SANGA corresponding to the Akkadian word *šangû*, but also as ŠID which corresponds to the Akkadian word *iššiakku/iššakku*, which can generally be translated as "governor". The correct interpretation of the sign can only be established through an analysis of the context, especially since both terms are found in formulaic expressions. In the inscriptions of Aššur-uballiṭ I, the context suggest that the sign in question should be read as ŠID, as it was actually done by A. K. Grayson. For an example, see RIMA 1, A.0.73.1: 13.

3 RIMA 2, A.0.98.1: 1–4.

out their will, this means that the king was destined to be their ambassador. Accordingly, the role of the king as a priest was rooted in this ideology and as a ruler he took the role of the high priest. Therefore, in royal inscriptions, such as those of Ashurnasirpal II, the decision of the gods about ***the establishment of the king's priesthood*** was clearly announced:

> *...provider of offerings for the great gods, legitimate nobleman, to whom is perpetually entrusted the proper administration of the rites of the temples of his land, whose deeds and offerings the great gods of heaven and underworld love and* (*therefore*) *established forever his priesthood in the temples.*[4]

Although shorter, similar accounts of the establishment of the king's priesthood by the decision of the great gods can be found in a royal inscription of Tiglath-pileser III and one of Esarhaddon.[5] As the great gods determined their chosen one to take over the kingship, I would like to make the following clarification here – with the enthronement of the king the king immediately takes on his priestly role. This is well documented in the sources and clearly mentioned in a royal inscription of Esarhaddon.[6]

Generally, there are a few groups of direct references that are related to the king's priestly role (Table 1): the establishment of the king's priesthood by the gods; statements about the gods wishing/requiring the priesthood of the king; statements about the gods loving his priesthood; the direct beginning of priestly power along with the enthronement; clear mentions of the king as a priest, including mentions such as the king as an exalted priest, a supreme, an attentive and holy priest; statements of the king wishing a successful priesthood for himself; omens related to the continuity of the king's stable priesthood. In addition, the royal inscriptions' references to the offerings and sacrifices made by the king are considered activities that represent his priestly authority. In summary, direct references to the king's priestly authority can be seen in Table 1.

The instances mentioning that ***the gods love the king's priesthood*** are often accompanied by narratives of achievements made by the king. Sometimes the performance of certain ritual acts are mentioned, and in some cases it is also reported that sacrifices were made by the king. As an example, I will cite an excerpt from the aforementioned inscription of Aššurdān II, which reads:

> [*The gods Ninurta and Nergal*], *who love my priesthood, gave to me the wild beasts* (*and*) *commanded me* [*to hunt*]. *I killed from my ... chariot* (*and*) *on my swift feet*

4 RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: i 23–25. Identical contents with this part – RIMA 2, A.0.101.17: 19–23; as well as A.0.101.20, as it is found some small damages – RIMA 2, A.0.101.20: 25–30. Another inscription, whose supposed reconstruction refers to the king's priesthood entrusted by the gods, is RIMA 2, A.0.101.49 – see A.0.101.49: 7–9.

5 RINAP 1, no. 37: 11; RINAP 4, no. 98: r. 6–7.

6 RINAP 4, no. 116: obv. 21′.

> [*with the spear*] *120 lions within* [...]. *I killed 1600 wild bulls. I captured two* [*strong*] *wild virile bulls by ambush. I killed 56 elephants.*[7]

Accounts similar to these were also compiled by the Assyrian kings Adad-nērārī II, Tukultī-Ninurta II, Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III.[8] The quoted text actually narrates the king's hunting of lions and bulls, a test that each Assyrian king had to pass in order to prove his abilities and skills.[9] This tradition of a royal hunt has been known since the late phase of the Uruk period, when it was registered iconographically.[10] In this case, the ritual act was performed by the command of the gods Ninurta and Nergal, who, apparently, were pleased with the priestly acts of the king. Their specific names were mentioned, since the royal hunt was associated with the king's militancy and the killing of wild beasts. Accordingly, the most appropriate gods to be involved in this case were the god of war, Ninurta, and the god of the netherworld, Nergal.

Other occasions when the formula in question was used could be cases of conquest or military victory. An inscription of Adad-nērārī II is a proper example to be cited. The following lines refer to the collection of tributes from the Aramean kingdoms in the region of Ḫanigalbat. The inscription reads as follows:

> *By the exalted strength of the god Šamaš, lord of my tiara, lover of my priesthood, I received from him* (*Abi-salāmu – m. n., Z. T.*) *his numerous chariots, teams of horses, silver, gold, the property of his palace. I imposed upon him tribute.*[11]

An essential moment in the use of such formulaic expressions was when the king paid attention and care to the respective deity. For example, we come across the following lines from an inscription of Ashurnasirpal II:

> *Because of my voluntary offerings and my prayers the goddess Ištar, the mistress who loves my priesthood, approved of me and she made up her mind to make war and battle.*[12]

Here, actually, the causal link between the priesthood and the success consists not only of the fact that the goddess was satisfied with the priestly activity of the king, but also due to

7 RIMA 2, A.0.98.1: 68–72.

8 The inscription of Adad-nērārī II – RIMA 2, A.0.99.2: 122–127. The inscriptions of Tukultī-Ninurta II – RIMA 2, A.0.100.3: rev. 5′–6′.; RIMA 2, A.0.100.5: 134–135. The inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II – RIMA 2, A.0.101.2: 40–42; RIMA 2, A.0.101.30: 84–94. The inscriptions of Shalmaneser III – RIMA 3, A.0.102.6: 40–44; RIMA 3, A.0.102.16: 341′–347′.

9 Mentioning the capture and killing of elephants was not part of the early Mesopotamian tradition.

10 For more on the origin and distribution of the scene in time and space, see Tarhan 2019–2020, 76–84.

11 RIMA 2, A.0.99.22: 102–104.

12 RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: i 37–38. In another inscription of Ashurnasirpal II, the same message is attested (see RIMA 2, A.0.101.17: i 46–49).

her nature as a goddess of war, she was of utmost importance for winning in the coming battles.

The group of references in which ***the king is defined as a priest*** is especially important, as the Akkadian words used for a priest, expressed in Sumerograms, vary. In fact, they are not synonymous with each other, but actually have a different semantic load. Prior to the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, the royal inscriptions lacked epithets mentioning the king's priestly title, so there is no mentioning of the king as supreme, high, or any other epithet for a priest. However, as can be seen from the above inscriptions, the priesthood of the Assyrian kings was attested in the inscriptions. With the appearance of Ashurnasirpal II on the political scene, the epithet "exalted priest" – *šangû ṣīru* – is documented in one of his inscriptions.[13] The formula also appeared in three of the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III (used a total of four times).[14] However, Ashurbanipal was mentioned being a *šangû* of the god Aššur without any further epithets.[15]

In their royal inscriptions, the Assyrian kings Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon and Esarhaddon were entitled "***priest of the god Aššur***" – SANGA *aš-sur*.[16] Shalmaneser III was also called "splendid priest of the god Aššur", which in Akkadian was written as *šabrû Aššur šurruḫu*.[17] The term *šabrû* used here refers to a priest with administrative functions, in this case, the highest priest and temple administrator of the supreme Assyrian deity. The use of this phrase is not attested among the other kings. These expressions further reinforce the idea that the Assyrian king was elevated as a high priest. The clarification is important in order to make clear that, contrary to other periods and civilisations, the Assyrian ruler was not dependent on the temple or the priests, rather the temple and the priests were dependent on him.

Another different use of the expression for the king as a priest, present in one of the inscriptions of Tukultī-Ninurta II and five of Ashurnasirpal II, is the "***attentive purification priest***"– *išippu na'du/na'ādu*.[18] Here the word for priest is *išippu*, associated with the performance of purification rituals.

The last use of an expression from the group in question defined the king as a "***holy priest***" – *šangû ellu*. This expression is found among the kings Šamšī-Adad V, Adad-nērārī III, Shalmaneser IV, Sargon and Ashurbanipal.[19] In fact, the primary meaning of the adjective *ellu* is "pure", which allows to be perceived as "holy" or "sacred". By using this epithet, the purpose was probably to reveal that the personality of the king-priest is immaculate.

13 RIMA 2, A.0.101.49: 6.
14 RIMA 3, A.0.101.10: i 13; RIMA 3, A.0.102.11: 10'; RIMA 3, A.0.102.14: 17; RIMA 3, A.0.102.16: 4.
15 RINAP 5/2, no. 1027: obv. 2'.
16 RINAP 1, no. 35: i 21; RINAP 1, no. 37: i 12; RINAP 2, no. 1003: 10'; RINAP 4, no. 48: obv. 22; RINAP 4, no. 57: i 4.
17 RIMA 3, A.0.102.56: 2.
18 By the inscription of Tukultī-Ninurta II – see RIMA 2, A.0.100.1: 22. By the inscription of Ashurnasirpal II – see RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: 21; RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: 127; RIMA 2, A.0.101.17: 15; RIMA 2, A.0.101.20: 20; RIMA 2, A.0.101.26: 35; RIMA 2, A.0.101.47: 11–12.
19 RIMA 3, A.0.103.1: i 30; RIMA 3, A.0.104.8: 3; RIMA 3, A.0.105.3: obv. 10; RINAP 2, no. 65: 5; RINAP 5/1, no. 11: vii 94; RINAP 5/1, no. 61: obv. 5; RINAP 5/2, no. 194: i 41.

Apart from the direct mentions of the king's priesthood, it has already been clarified that there were also royal inscriptions that testify to the exercise of priestly functions, namely the performance of various ritual activities and sacrifices.[20] A similar act of ritual activity was described by Ashurnasirpal II. As a result of Ashurnasirpal's victories in the lands of the Aramean and Neo-Hittite states in 876 B.C., the king reached the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, an achievement last noted before him only by Tiglath-pileser I. The ruler punctuated this success with the ritual washing of his weapons at the sea and performed sacrifices for the great gods.[21] The performance of the ritual act of washing weapons in a large body of water was a model set in the military rituals of Sargon (of the Akkadian period).[22]

Shalmaneser III performed a similar act. At the very beginning of his reign, he pursued an actively expansionist policy in the north, with Urarṭu becoming his main target. As a result of the campaign, the Assyrian king captured the fortified city of Sugunia then burned it and other cities in its vicinity. The inscription gave the following information about the actions:

> *Moving on from the city Sugunia, I went down to the lake of the land Na'iri. I washed my weapons in the lake* (*and*) *made sacrifices to my gods. At that time I made an image of myself* (*and*) *wrote thereon the praises of Aššur, the great lord,* (*and*) *the prowess of my power. I erected* (*it*) *by the lake. On my return from the lake I approached the city Gizānu. I received tribute from Asua of the land Gilzānu: teams of horses* (*and*) *camels with two humps. I brought* (*the tribute – m. n., Z. T.*) *to my city Aššur.*[23]

The text is a proof not only of the fact that the king reached the lake of the Na'iri land (modern Lake Van), but of his authority as well, as the ideological meaning of the rituals performed by Shalmaneser is emphasised. The ritual of washing the weapons was accompanied by sacrifices to the gods on the shore, the most central of them being occupied by Aššur to whom the king owed his victories. As a result, a stela with the image of Shalmaneser III was erected, recounting the king's achievements in Urarṭu.

The King as a Priest in the Iconographic Sources

The royal inscriptions elucidate that the king was the chosen one of the gods, and therefore was called to rule according their will. That is also the reason why he was entrusted with the most important priestly functions. This belief is also visible in the iconographic sources that have reached us through the palace and residential reliefs from Imgur-Ellil, as well as on depictions on certain seals. Among these sources, the scenes in the palace com-

20 For more on the types of offerings, donations and cult practices in Mesopotamia, see Lambert 2016, 171–179.

21 RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: iii 84–85.

22 RIME 2, E2.1.1.1: 50–52 (Sum), 56–58 (Akk); RIME 2, E2.1.1.2: 59–61.

23 RIMA 3, A.0.102.1: 33–40.

plex in the city of Kalḫu, proclaimed a capital by Ashurnasirpal II (879 B.C.), are especially important. An example of a traceable correspondence between the royal inscriptions and visual narratives is the scene from slab 23 in the *Throneroom* of the *Northwest Palace* in Kalḫu (Fig. 1).[24] It is of particular importance because – as argued in my monograph[25] – it marks the beginning of the kingship of Ashurnasirpal II, the recipient of earthly power by the god Aššur. Being already a king, he was also a high priest.

Another example, which corresponds well with the written accounts, comes from the same palace (Fig. 2).[26] The king is depicted in the presence of winged deities (also called winged genies) and royal officials. There the ruler was represented during the performance of ritual activities. Subsequent steps of the performance of a particular ritual with the active participation of the king are documented on the scenes. The king is depicted in different moment and therefore the king can be seen more than once in one scene. In the presented scene, the king is attested once between two winged creatures, holding arrows in his right hand and a bow in his left. The winged deities on both sides carry a small cauldron in their left hands, while their right hands are raised and hold cones. It seems that this moment represents the performance of purification rituals and/or the offering of blessings. In the second depiction, the king is presented as performing libation – in his right hand he holds a vessel, and in his left – a spear, the ruler is surrounded by beardless officials, eunuchs, who from the time of Ashurnasirpal II onwards began to occupy high positions and key positions in the royal court.[27] They were perceived as the most trustworthy and truly dedicated servants to the king.[28] Scenes from the palace reliefs also reinforce this interpretation – specifically in the scene under discussion, the servant to the left of the main figure is depicted with certain attributes such as a bow, arrow quiver, sword and holding a mace in his right hand. The servant in front of the king is depicted with a towel thrown over his left shoulder, as he holds the other side of the towel in his left hand. The right hand of the attendee is raised to the king and holds an object that is defined in this scene and similar to a *fly-flapper*[29] *or fly-whisk*.[30] It is hard for me to imagine that this object would have played such a role and that such an ordinary object would have been depicted in the context of an important ritual. I already argued that it was an object that was immersed in a vessel, or even in the depicted one, to scatter its contents – be it water, aromatic oils, as well as other liquid and even powdered substances, which action serve to purify and/or bless.[31] The idea of a purifying object that scatters the respective contents has already been suggested. C. Barcina mentioned the object in question, noting that it is often referred to as fly-whisk, but should be perceived as a purification device with which

24 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1849–0502–15 (15.09.2024)
25 Tarhan 2025, 168–169.
26 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1850–1228–10 (15.00.2024)
27 Frahm 2017, 170.
28 Ambos 2009, 4–5. For the role of eunuchs in the ancient Middle East, their power, and some interesting observations, see Ambos 2009, 1–7. On the Assyrian eunuchs, see Deller 1999, 303–311.
29 Budge 1914, 18.
30 Harper, Pittman 1980, 21.
31 Tarhan 2022, 236; Tarhan 2025, 184.

one can scatter aromas.[32] In support of this opinion one can refer to the following excerpt of a ritual text, providing information about the ritual actions of the king in the Akītu temple: *"He pou*[*rs*] *a kukkubu-vessel of water, miḫḫu beer, beer, wine, milk, and blood upon them. He sprinkles flour and swings the purification device* (*ša-tēlissi*)*."*[33] The text mentions that after the offering of the sacrificial animals on the 8th day of the month *nisannu*, the king made libations, but also scattered flour and swung a purification device.[34]

In numerous instances, the discussed character holds in his left hand not a towel, but a small vessel with a long handle and an uneven bottom.[35] Due to its rounded bottom with a bud and its long curved handle, this vessel could not have stood on flat surfaces. It could have been held only by an object within which it is inserted or fixed in some way, or, more likely, simply carried in the hand, as usually seen in Assyrian reliefs. Here and in similar scenes, the vessel itself is defined as a *ladle*[36] or *lamp*.[37] The interpretation that it is a scooping device is absolutely acceptable given its physical characteristics. Due to the available data from the ritual and cultic texts, I am inclined to allow another possibility, namely that it can be identified with the terms *ša-tēlissi* (purification device) or *nidnakku* (portable censer).[38] In both cases, they were vessels containing aromatic substances, the smell of which was spread by swinging/shaking.

The scenes with plots similar to those reliefs may present similar ritual activities. If we accept this proposal, however, let us note that the difference between the ritual text and the scene in Fig. 2 is that in the text the mentioned actions were performed by the king, and in the visual narrative the king performed the libation and the beardless official sprinkled powders/liquids with the right hand and swung the purification device with the left.

Scenes with a somewhat similar plot to the one in Fig. 2, but containing differences, are known not only from palace reliefs, but also from cylinder seals.[39] An example is the scene of a cylinder seal from *The Morgan Library Museum* with number MS 0776.[40] The difference is the lack of a winged male character in the scene, but also between the king sitting on the throne and the official in front of him there was a table with a cover (?) and a cup on top. In addition, specific symbols of deities were depicted – a winged disk (of Šamaš), a crescent (of Sîn), and a star with eight rays (of Ištar), as well as the cuneiform sign DIŠ.[41]

The motif of presenting the king with a bow during a libation, surrounded by or in the presence of armed palace official(s), is also attested both on monumental stone slabs

32 Barcina 2017, 120.
33 SAA 20 15: ii 12′–15′.
34 The whole source – SAA 20 15.
35 https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322611 (23.01.2021)
36 Harper, Pittman 1980, 21.
37 See the webpage of The Metropolitan Museum of Art about the slab with number 32.143.4.
38 Tarhan 2022, 236–237; Tarhan 2025, 184.
39 The presence of other plot scenes, borrowed from the palace art, can be seen on the cylinder and stamp seals. See Russell 2017, 492–493.
40 https://www.themorgan.org/seals-and-tablets/84398 (22.01.2021)
41 For more on the symbols of the gods, see Black, Green 2001, 108–109, 135, 182–186. For more on the meanings of the cuneiform sign in question, see Borger 2010, 417–418.

and on cylinder seals. An example of the latter are two seals from the *British Museum* with numbers BM 89655[42] and BM 89618.[43] This motif actually often depicted the performance of a ritual after a conquest or the successful completion of a royal hunt. The scenes representing this particular hunt are particularly interesting and, to some extent, complement the royal inscriptions. While slabs 20/upper register[44] and 19/upper register[45] from the *Throneroom* depict the hunting of bulls and lions, on 20/lower register[46] and 19/lower register[47] are represented scenes from its successful completion – the king pouring libation on the bodies of fallen beasts.

The last image under consideration comes from the bronze bands of the gates of Shalmaneser III from the Assyrian city of Imgur-Ellil.[48] The scene in the lower register illustrates the battle of Sugunia, and the upper register gives a visual idea of the sacrifices and rituals performed.[49] Both registers are accompanied by epigraphs about what was happening. We see once again the tight correspondence between image and narrative. On the left in the upper scene, two soldiers threw the limbs of a sacrificial animal into the lake. To the right of them is a rock relief with the image of the king, located in the nearby area. After the rock image, the following objects are presented: two standards, a ritual table, a stationary incense burner, and a spherical vessel standing on a stand. The king poured libation in the presence of other priests and musicians. Next, the animals needed for the sacrifices appear, led by a priest with a dagger and soldiers.

The King as a Priest in the Ritual Texts

I now present an excerpt of a ritual text, giving information about the sequence of performing the actions within a respective ritual. The excerpt in question refers to the regular performance of a sacrifice. The source originates from Nineveh and dates back to the Neo-Assyrian period:

> *The k*[*in*]*g appears. He goes and loads the brazier, returns and provides hot cooked meal. He comes back and increases the heat of the brazier. He swings the pur*[*ifi*]*cation device, performs libations on the brazier, and sacrifices two bulls. From one of them, they* (*the participants – m. n., Z. T.*) *push its heart from inside it for the soup,* [*fr*]*om the other he* (*the king – m. n., Z. T.*) *provides cooked meat. ,* [*The ki*]*ng put*[*s on*] *the*

42 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_N-1212 (22.01.2021)
43 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_N-1105 (22.01.2021)
44 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1847–0623–12 (22.01.2021)
45 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1847–0623–11 (22.01.2021)
46 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1849–1222–18 (22.01.2021)
47 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1847–0623–13 (22.01.2021)
48 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_Rm-1042 (13.01.2021)
49 For more on the scenes, giving information about this event, as well as the descriptions of them, see King 1915, 21–22, Plates I–VI.

> *jewellery* (*the weapons – m. n., Z. T.*) *in the side room, bur*[*ns*] *female kids, leaves* [...] *aside, throws balussu. He finishes his* [*liba*]*tions...*[50]

The text presents the sacrifice of bulls and subsequently burning parts of them. These ritual activities were performed by the Assyrian king. The previous lines of the text, which are not presented here, reveal that the ritual took place around the altar in the temenos of the sanctuary, which is actually also evident from the presented excerpt.[51] The text informs that the priest (in the previous lines) and the king made important preparations before the sacrifice of the two bulls. The king participated in the preparation of the sacrifice. He provided the fire for the burning of the pieces of meat, made ritual purifications by fumes, libations, and then provided the blood sacrifice. The source mentions that the heart of one of bulls was taken out by other participants in the ritual activities, as it was intended for a soup, while parts of the meat were burned by the king. These accounts reveal not only the subsequent steps of the ritual performance made by the king, but also that being a priest has a practical side – loading the brazier, cooking and providing meals, purifying and pouring libations. These steps portray the Assyrian king as a servant of the great gods, mirroring what his servants might do for him.[52]

Summary and Concluding Remarks

The royal inscriptions focused on the ideological part of the Assyrian ruler's priestly role and cared less about the practical execution of his sacerdotal functions. The ritual texts inform us about the sequence of the ritual steps performed by the king, the other priests and participants of the ritual. In the reliefs ideological motifs as well as scenes of practical execution of the rituals are represented. The visual narratives represent the ruler mostly during libation or offering of sacrificial animals.

The discussion of the sources indicates that the priestly role of the Assyrian king was not fictitious, but completely real. In their inscriptions, the rulers reported that they had received both royal and priestly authority directly from the gods, which is why they were expected to reveal and carry out divine will. The kings were eager to prove their status as a darling of the gods through the actual exercise of their royal as well as their priestly role. The fact that the kings often stress the connection of their priestly role with their success on the battlefield is a further indication that serving the gods was of utmost importance to the Assyrian kings.

50 SAA 20 16: reverse iv, 2–10.
51 The whole source – SAA 20 16.
52 For further insights on this aspect, see Fink 2020, 62–66.

Fig. 1. Slab 23 from the Throneroom, Northwest Palace, Kalḫu
(© The Trustees of the British Museum).

Fig. 2. Reliefs from the *Northwest Palace*, Kalḫu
(© The Trustees of the British Museum).

Table 1. The King as a Priest in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions

Mentions	**King**	**References**
The great gods, who established the king's priesthood	Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: i 23–25 RIMA 2, A.0.101.17: 19–23 RIMA 2, A.0.101.20: 25–30 RIMA 2, A.0.101.49: 8–9 (?)
	Tiglath-pileser III	RINAP 1, no. 37: 11
	Esarhaddon	RINAP 4, no. 98: r. 6–7

Mentions	King	References
The (great) gods who wish/require the priesthood of the king	Tiglath-pileser III	RINAP 1, no. 37: 13
	Ashurbanipal	RINAP 5/1, no. 3: i 14 RINAP 5/1, no. 4: i 12 RINAP 5/1, no. 5: iii 7′ RINAP 5/1, no. 7: i 80′ RINAP 5/1, no. 8: i 19′ RINAP 5/1, no. 10: iv 6 RINAP 5/1, no. 13: i 25(?) RINAP 5/2, no. 101: r. i 3′
The great gods, who love the king's priesthood	Tiglath-pileser III	RINAP 1, no. 47: obv. 12
The king's priesthood that pleases the gods	Shalmaneser III	RIMA 3, A.0.102.2: i 11 RIMA 3, A.0.102.6: i 24 RIMA 3, A.0.102.8: 20–21 RIMA 3, A.0.102.10: 14 RIMA 3, A.0.102.11: 10′–11′ RIMA 3, A.0.102.14: 17–18 RIMA 3, A.0.102.38: 2′
Aššur, who loves the king's priesthood	Esarhaddon	RINAP 4, no. 98: obv. 1
Aššur and Ellil, who required the king's priesthood	Ashurbanipal	RINAP 5/2, no. 186: 4
Aššur and Ištar, who love the king's priesthood	Sennacherib	RINAP 3/1, no. 17: vi 47–48 RINAP 3/2, no. 39: vi 39 RINAP 3/2, no. 40: 4″–5″ RINAP 3/2, no. 41: 9′–10′ RINAP 3/2, no. 43: 36–37 RINAP 3/2, no. 44: 48
The king's priesthood that pleases Ellil	Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: i 11–12 RIMA 2, A.0.101.3: 20–21
Sîn and Šamaš, who confirm the stability of the king's priesthood	Esarhaddon	RINAP 4, no. 48: r. 60–61 RINAP 4, no. 116: r. 5–6
Šamaš, who loves the king's priesthood	Adad-nērārī II	RIMA 2, A.0.99.2: 103
Ištar, who loves the king's priesthood	Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: i 37–38 RIMA 2, A.0.101.17: i 46–49
	Esarhaddon	RINAP 4, no. 1: i 74 RINAP 4, no. 98: r. 27

Mentions	King	References
Ninurta and Nergal who love the king's priesthood	Aššur-dān II	RIMA 2, A.0.98.1: 68–72
	Adad-nērārī II	RIMA 2, A.0.99.2: 122–127
	Tukultī-Ninurta II	RIMA 2, A.0.100.3: rev. 5′–6′ RIMA 2, A.0.100.5: 134–135
	Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2, A.0.101.2: 40–42 RIMA 2, A.0.101.30: 84–94
	Shalmaneser III	RIMA 3, A.0.102.6: 40–44 RIMA 3, A.0.102.16: 341′–347′
Ninurta, who loves the king's priesthood	Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: i 99 RIMA 2, A.0.101.2: 26
	Shalmaneser III	RIMA 3, A.0.102.5: ii 1 RIMA 3, A.0.102.16: 34–35
The king's priesthood that pleases Ninurta	Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2, A.0.101.28: i 11–13 RIMA 2, A.0.101.29: 4′–5′ (?)
The king's priesthood required by Marduk	Ashurbanipal	RINAP 5/2, no. 116: obv. i 2′ RINAP 5/2, no. 222: obv. 7
Wishing Ninurta to love the king's priesthood	Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2, A.0.101.31: 17–19
Wishing Šarrat-nipḫi to love the king's priesthood	Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2, A.0.101.32: 14–15
The king who wishes a successful priesthood for himself	Tiglath-pileser III	RINAP 1, no. 37: 13 RINAP 1, no. 53: 27
	Esarhaddon	RINAP 4, no. 58, : v 11–12 RINAP 4, no. 59: ii 17–18
Omens related to the continuity of the king's stable priesthood	Esarhaddon	RINAP 4, no. 57: ii 11–17
The beginning of the king's priesthood along the beginning of his kingship	Esarhaddon	RINAP 4, no. 116: obv. 21′
Priest (*šangû*)	Ashurbanipal	RINAP 5/2, no. 1027: obv. 2′
Exalted priest (*šangû ṣīru*)	Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2, A.0.101.49: 6
	Shalmaneser III	RIMA 3, A.0.101.10: i 13 RIMA 3, A.0.102.11: 10′ RIMA 3, A.0.102.14: 17 RIMA 3, A.0.102.16: 4

Mentions	King	References
Holy priest (*šangû ellu*)	Šamšī-AdadV	RIMA 3, A.0.103.1: i 30
	Adad-nērārī III	RIMA 3, A.0.104.8: 3
	Shalmaneser IV.	RIMA 3, A.0.105.3: obv. 10
	Sargon II	RINAP 2, no. 65: 5
	Ashurbanipal	RINAP 5/1, no. 11: vii 94 RINAP 5/1, no. 61: obv. 5 RINAP 5/2, no. 194: i 41
Splendid priest of the god Aššur (*šabrû Aššur šurruḫu*)	Shalmaneser III	RIMA 3, A.0.102.56: 2
Attentive purification priest (*išippu na'du/na'ādu*)	Tukultī-Ninurta II	RIMA 2, A.0.100.1: 22
	Ashurnasirpal II	RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: i 21 RIMA 2, A.0.101.1: iii 127 RIMA 2, A.0.101.17: 15 RIMA 2, A.0.101.20: 20 RIMA 2, A.0.101.26: 35 RIMA 2, A.0.101.47: 11–12
Priest of the god Aššur (SANGA *aš-šur*)	Tiglath-pileser III	RINAP 1, no. 35: i 21 RINAP 1, no. 37: i 12
	Sargon II	RINAP 2, no. 1003: 10'
	Esarhaddon	RINAP 4, no. 48: obv. 22 RINAP 4, no. 57: i 4

Abbreviations

RIMA 1	Grayson 1987
RIMA 2	Grayson 1991
RIMA 3	Grayson 1996
RIME 2	Frayne 1993
RINAP 1	Tadmor, Yamada 2011
RINAP 2	Frame 2021
RINAP 3/1	Grayson, Novotny 2012
RINAP 3/1	Grayson, Novotny 2012
RINAP 3/2	Grayson, Novotny 2014
RINAP 4	Leichty 2011
RINAP 5/1	Novotny, Jeffers 2018
RINAP 5/2	Jeffers, Novotny 2023
SAA 20	Parpola 2017

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Egyptian priests: cultic agents, managers or civic servants[1]

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In a paper read at an conference in Wrocław in 2019 and aptly named „Timeo Danaos" Alan B. Lloyd succinctly summarizes the decline of the native culture of Egypt in the Greco-Roman period, the process inseparably tied to the downturn of the social position of Egyptian priests, the veritable guardians of religion, tradition and high culture of Egypt. He underlines the high position occupied by Egyptian priests in the Ptolemaic age and points to Early-Imperial times as the moment of its rapid degeneration. Lloyd identifies two fundamental factors which contributed to the erosion of the once dominating position of Egyptian priests: their economic condition weakened by the tight control over Egyptian temples and their resources exercised by the Imperial authority and the unique and overwhelming attractiveness of the Greek culture. The long period of the Greek-speaking Macedonian and Roman rule made the Greek culture attractive by virtue of being culture of the ruling state-elite. "Given time, the conqueror's culture will come to be seen as the elite prestige culture to which even the elites of the subject population will aspire. It will become *their* culture, and gradually their allegiance to their native tradition will be eroded and lost."[2]

In the early-Imperial age these processes enrolled on a surprisingly rapid pace making the priestly repository of the traditional Egyptian culture almost empty by the end of the 2nd c. CE.[3] Not denying the lure of the Greek culture this paper wants to investigate whether there were other factors of the waning power of the Egyptian priesthood under Roman rule and whether we can identify the moment when the collapse of their centuries-long domination among the populace of Egypt accelerated. I propose to introduce into this discussion the transformation of administrative and notarial practices in Egypt between the Ptolemaic and Imperial age. However dry and unattractive this approach might seem, it allows us to base the discussion on the tangible assets of rich written docu-

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2 Lloyd 2023, the quotation is on p. 259.

3 Clarysse 2010, 290.

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mentation of Greco-Roman Egypt. This is not the place to ponder if writing played greater role in social life in Egypt than in other lands in antiquity or not. It suffices to say that hundreds of thousands of pieces of writing on papyrus and ostraca which survived to our times from Greco-Roman Egypt affords us an unique opportunity to study Egyptian society in the light of documentary evidence, little known elsewhere in the Mediterranean. This approach does not want to overlook the basic role played by Egyptian priests in the realm of religion and related issues, connected with afterlife and animal cult.[4] It proposes to look beyond these roles, important as they were, to consider less obvious activities of Egyptian priests, those underpinning their social position in the society at large.

A few remarks on the role the priestly class played in society and administration of pharaonic Egypt are necessary to sketch the starting point of the discussion. The administrative system of pre-Macedonian Egypt evolved, retaining, however, some basic qualities. The state machinery was best represented on the top levels, from the grand vizier to governors of *sepat* or nomes in Greek. Nomes themselves were centered around leading local temples, while, beginning with the Middle Kingdom, lower echelons of administration consisted of judicial-cum-administrative councils (*kenbet*) composed of local notables and priests.[5] Apart from adjudicating cases, *kenbet* was also the board before whom marriage contracts were made, initially orally but in the Late Period more and more often in writing.[6]

From the texts we know the priest's personnel on a different levels of temples like for example: "temple overseers, temple scribes, scribes and cultivators of divine offerings, scribes of the divine seal, masters of foodbearers, high priests, priests, overseers of singers".[7] High priest "First Servant of the God" mentioned earlier from the end of XVIIth dynasty has changed. There are confirmed titles of the high priest and royal sealer worn by one person, for example by Djhuty and Minmont called Senires. The first one held also the overseer of sealers title.[8]

There are also very early examples priests bearing several priest titles, sometimes from different temples. The connection of the royal funerary administration cults and place of stay and "other institutions of the Egyptian state is clearly reflected in the strings of the titles of the officials who were appointed as priests in the pyramid complexes". We can see this situation in the sun temples and funerary temples. There were priests (*ḥm-nṯr*) who held positions in both of these places.[9] Sometimes one person could be *ḥm-nṯr* priest in many pyramid complexes.[10] There are also examples that the same person could be *ḥm-nṯr* priest and *ḫntj-š* who usually was connected to only one temple and one deceased pharaoh.[11] In one of the document we read that *ḥm-nṯr* priest could have been ask to take the

4 For a short of these issues see Spencer 2010, 259–267.
5 Haring 2010, 225–227.
6 Haring 2010, 234–235.
7 Shirley 2013, 562.
8 Shirley 2013, 563.
9 Vymazalová 2013, 183.
10 Vymazalová 2013, 187.
11 Vymazalová 2013, 188.

wab priest functions or lector priest fulfill the function of *wab* priest.[12] The *wab* priest was obligated to collect linen, grain and mother products, as well as taking care of the sealings of the "house of the cloth" and "house of the statues".[13]

The idea of separation of military, civil and religious authority was alien to pharaonic Egypt where viziers supervised all these three spheres of the activity of the Egyptian state. Large temples had complex priestly structures from a 'First Servant of the God' (High Priest) to simple prophets, lectors and stolists. It was huge, with up to 10 % of the population of Ptolemaic Fayum being priests, even if minority were employed full time in cultic positions.[14] Although the priestly class was basically hereditary, its individual members owned their position to the appointment by a pharaoh or his lieutenants.[15]

The same people are attested in high priestly offices and in state administration and military. Appointments were often made within one family and inscriptions on numerous statues attest to the near hereditary position of many Egyptian high-ranking priests.[16] From the New Kingdom on high priests in Abydos, Memphis but first of all in Thebes assumed increasingly more and more powerful political position, difficult to control by some pharaohs.[17] One of the most important title of high priest is from the temple of Amun in Karnak. From New Kingdom Period this and others Theban temples there are much more sources than from for example large temples of Heliopolis and Memphis. The high position of Thebes was connected with the intensive building program of the pharaohs of XVIIIth dynasty and a special financing policy. When pharaohs came back from military campaigns Thebes always received goods and spoils.[18] High priest of Amun played not only a religious role, but also administrative in the late New Kingdom. In papyri sources we read about him as a person connected with expeditions to the mines on the Eastern Desert.[19] In one of the papyrus the high priest Ramessesnakht was obligate to supply 100 deben of galena to the king's court. The other papyrus mention about the same high priest who wrote to Nubian soldiers who were responsible for the protection of the gold mines which can be attack by Beduins. Except that high priest of Amun had control "over personnel of the royal memorial temples on the west bank" and in the name of the king he was an inspector of important local problems like for example "strikes" of the necropolis workers, grain rations.[20]

The turbulent years of the second half of the 4th c. BCE, marked by a rapid transition from the last native XXX dynasty, to the second Persian rule of Artaxerxes III, Artaxerxes III (Arses) and Darius III, to the early years of the Macedonian rule of Alexander the

12 Document 62–63A from pyramid of Neferefre; Vymazalová 2013, 191.
13 Vymazalová 2013, 192.
14 Clarysse and Thompson 2006, 195. For double-digit proportion of priests among parties of marriage and sales contracts see Johnson 1986.
15 Clarysse 2010, 287–288; Spencer 2010, 256–260.
16 Spencer 2010. 268–269.
17 Spencer 2010, 268–269.
18 Haring 2013, 609.
19 KRI VI, 517–522; Haring 2013, 631–632.
20 Haring, 2013, 632–633.

Great, his Argead successors and Ptolemy (I), produced a number of Egyptian notables skilled in manouvering between conflicting powers. All better known to us held important priestly offices: Somtutefnakht, in the words of his inscription, "priest of Horus, lord of Hebnu; priest of the gods of the Oryx nome; priest of Somtus of Yat-hehu; divine Mount, supervisor of riverbank; chief of priests of Sekhmet in the whole land, Somtutefnakht; son of the master grain, the priest of Amun-Re",[21] Petosiris from Hermopolis Magna, the high priest of Thoth, the prophet of the Ogdoad, chief of priests of Sekhmet, leader of the priests of the third and fourth phyles, the royal scribe, second prophet of Khum-Re,[22] Wennefer, a priest in the temple of Isis in Bebheit el-Hagar, "prophet of the statues of Nectanebo, Falcon and prophet of the statues of the king's father, a general Tjahepimu." Wennefer is attested to have participated in the funeral of the Apis bull in the Serapeum.[23] Prominent member of the priestly elite of Egypt Wereshnefer performed a stunning number of functions in various parts of Egypt. Among others, he was a priest of "Sekhmet in Thebes, of Horus in the temple of Nephthys, of the great Mut, of the lady Asheru, of Neith, of the great and divine mother, of the lady of Koptos and Satet, of the great lady of Elephantine." The lifespan of Wereshnefer must have stretched from the age of the XXX dynasty until Ptolemy I.[24] Djedhor the Saviour from Athribis. Statues of Djedhor bear magical and biographical inscriptions; one of them reads: "the Chief Doorkeeper of Horus Kenty-Khenty and Chief Guardian of the Falcon with all his gods, Djedhor, son of Djedhor (*Djd-ḥr*)."[25] To a degree the elevated position of Egyptian high priests continued throughout the Ptolemaic age, the best example being the family of high priests of Ptah in Memphis where Ptolemaic kings assumed the crown of Egypt. This priestly family was a frequent recipient of royal munificence and its later generations may have been related to the Ptolemaic court and perhaps to the royal family.[26] The priests families of high social standing combined priestly, administration and sometimes military titles.[27] There are examples from the Thebaid area of governors (*strategoi*) who belonged to the important priestly families. They held the position for a long time and tried to keep it for their sons.[28] In Ptolemaic Period important and dominant families could have more than one title and office, like for example more than one office of prophet, combine with other priestly offices.[29] We no longer hear of this phenomenon in Roman times when ca. 20 BCE Augustus

21 Urk II. 1–6 (trans. Lichtheim 2006); Tresson 1931, 369–391; Roeder 1959, Perdu 1985, 97; Briant 2002, 860; Lichtheim 2006, III, 42.

22 Otto 1954, 174–184 ; Ray 1987, 89; Devauchelle 1995, 78–79; Menu 1995, 87–89; Menu 1998, 24–26; Briant 2002, 860–861; Lichtheim 2006, 44–45. For an analysis of inscriptions from the tomb of Petosiris see: Menu 1994, Menu 1995a, Menu 1998.

23 Arnold 1997, 34.

24 Arnold 1997, 37.

25 Jelínková-Reymond 1956, 113–114, Sherman 1981, 90 (trans. Sherman).

26 Hölbl 2019, 3–7. On the family of high priests of Ptah in Memphis in the Ptolemaic age see Thompson.

27 Clarysse 2009, 573.

28 Monson 2012, 258.

29 Monson 2012, 214.

ceased to appoint high priests of Ptah, discontinuing the Ptolemaic tradition and putting an end to the elevated position of this priestly clan.[30] Roman rule in Egypt did not have to rely on the political support of the native priestly class nearly as much as mid- to late Ptolemies, beginning with Ptolemy V did.[31] Rare cases of political dissent associated with if not led by high priests of Amun in Thebes were suppressed by military force.

Temples owned a very large proportion of arable land in Egypt, reportedly as much as 1/3 of the total land[32] and issues of protection and restoration of temple estates dominated pharaoh's legislation, at least this portion of it which priests decided to commit to papyrus or stone.[33] The role played by priests in economy extended far beyond agriculture: some are attested in quarrying expedition and supervising construction works at temples, a monumental and never-ending task indeed.[34] Temples and priests continued to be great beneficiaries of the state support in the Ptolemaic age when Egyptian temples received yearly subsidies (*syntaxis*) and their property was taxed on reduced rates or not liable to some taxes at all.[35] In pharaonic times priestly scribes were the backbone of state administration and temples played the paramount role in taxing people and transferring the income, minus cost and cult expenditure, to the state. The Ptolemies introduced civil administration and the principal of farming (some) taxes. The process of converting the tax and administrative system of Egypt was, however, gradual and never completed by 30 BCE. Many Egyptian priests took full advantage of new opportunities becoming tax farmers, working for the Macedonian administration as 'royal scribes' and staffing its mid-ranking echelons, e.g. becoming *agoranomoi*, taking over the position of the royal overseer of the temple (*epistates*), while temple storage houses continued to store grain exacted from peasants before it was transferred to the central administration of the Ptolemaic state.[36] The number of Egyptian priests enjoying the tax-free status was so big, that Ptolemaic kings felt necessary to introduce a numerous clauses of the privileged clergy.[37]

For all Macedonian/Greek administrative hierarchy introduced by the Ptolemies it looks that not much changed in life of regular people in Egypt when Ptolemy son of Lagos took over the effective rule in Memphis in 323 BCE. The following discussion will concentrate on documentary evidence which elucidate the transformation of the role played by the priestly establishment in handling administrative matters in Egypt. In Ptolemaic Egypt documents related to marriage and divorce and other contracts were produced by priests in temple establishments and written down in demotic, much the same way as they were produced in pharaonic times. The types of demotic private contracts are analyzed in a 2003 paper of Mark Depauw.[38] Their prevalence for most of the Hellenistic age testifies

30 Hölbl 2019, 8.
31 Hölbl 2019, 9–14.
32 D.S. I 27.7, I 73.2. Mélèze Modrzejewski 2001, 501.
33 Haring 2010, 232.
34 Spencer 2010, 269–270.
35 Clarysse 2010, 281–283.
36 Clarysse 2010, 283–285.
37 Clarysse 2010, 289.
38 Depauw 2003.

to the pivotal position of priest acting as public officials producing documents admissible in courts of law. As far as we can say in the early-Ptolemaic age they exercised monopoly in this field.

The evolution of the temple-based system of authenticating and producing documents started in the Hellenistic age with the introduction in some places in Egypt in the 3rd c. BCE of *grapheion*, or state notary offices where Greek or demotic documents could be registered. Translating of demotic documents into Greek is attested from 147 BCE. With time some demotic scribes started to work in *grapheia* rather than in temples. On top of that Greek was making inroads in private contracts in Egypt which eventually brought the demise of the original demotic form of Egyptian private contracts.[39] Not all aspects of this process are known to us. What seems certain is that it did not happen at the same time everywhere in Egypt, e. g. in the Fayum Oasis demotic contracts survived much longer than in Thebes or Elephantine.[40] We can only guess that its gradual proliferation resulted from variety of factors: needs of non-Egyptian parties, more used to Greek-type than demotic contracts, growing prestige of contracts written in the language of the new ruling class of Egypt, and the increasing demand for authentification of vital documents in Greek and in demotic alike in state *grapheia*. Although the expansion of Greek contracts written in *grapheia* effectively ended the monopoly of the priestly establishment of Egypt in making documents admissible in courts, for most of the Ptolemaic age traditional demotic contracts coexisted with those produced in state *grapheia*.

The process of retreat from demotic documents written by priests for interested parties accelerated tremendously in the beginning of Roman rule. Language in which private contracts in Egypt were composed was not the only change noticeable in the notarial practice in the early-1st c. CE. In the Ptolemaic age two types of Greek private documents are distinguished according to the nature of subscription: *cheirographon* (autograph agreement) and *hypographe* (autograph subscription).[41] The first one took in essence the form of the formal letter with the names of the sender and the receiver without further authentification. *Hypographe* or subscription of the party who initiated contract was placed in contracts called *syngraphe* which in addition were authenticated by (usually) six witnesses named at the bottom of a document. From ca. 182 BCE *hypographe* appears in *cheirographa* when scribe and declarant are different.[42]

In Roman times documents of the *cheirographon* type overshadowed other types of documents. From the beginning of the 1st c. CE all contracts in Greek created by a notary had to be subscribed by the party who initiated the contract. Bearing in mind limited literacy level in Egypt this could be done by a scribe or *hypographeus* also named in the document. Both proliferation of *cheirographa* and necessity to employ official scribes resulted in the fast-growing importance of notary offices in Roman times. The earliest document

39 Depauw 2003; Monson 2012, 126–127, 131; Claytor 2014.
40 Depauw 2003, 89.
41 Depauw 2003, 85.
42 Llewelyn 1992, 107; Depauw 2003, 85, 97.

which lists a *hypographeus* is dated to 19 CE.[43] In Roman Egypt temple as the place where private contracts (in demotic) were produced was replaced by *grapheion* issuing contracts in Greek.[44] In practical terms under the first two Emperors professional scribes employed in state *grapheia* started to replace Egyptian priests as the principal notarial agents.

Notary offices were located in *metropoleis* and in larger nomes also in administrative subunits (*merides*). Expansion and soon dominance of state notary offices (*grapheia*) created a powerful move from the traditional Egyptian principle of administration focused on temples and run by priests to administration centered in *metropoleis*, artificial units introduced in the early-Ptolemaic age and greatly expanded in Roman times.[45] Private contracts in Roman Egypt were more and more often composed in Greek rather than in demotic and parties to a contract are identified by their place of origin. Since both the place where they were created and very often the place where middle- to upper-class parties to contracts and witnesses resided were metropoleis, the number of attestations of metropolis in private contracts grows slowly through the 1st c. CE to large numbers in the 2nd c. CE. As indicated above, the process of supplanting of demotic documents by Greek contract was gradual, progressing from the beginning of the 1st c. CE until the completion of the process in the 2nd c. CE. One may notice a pronounced rise of attestations of metropolis in Egyptian documents after the first quarter of the 1st c. CE (fig. 1) which coincides with these processes.

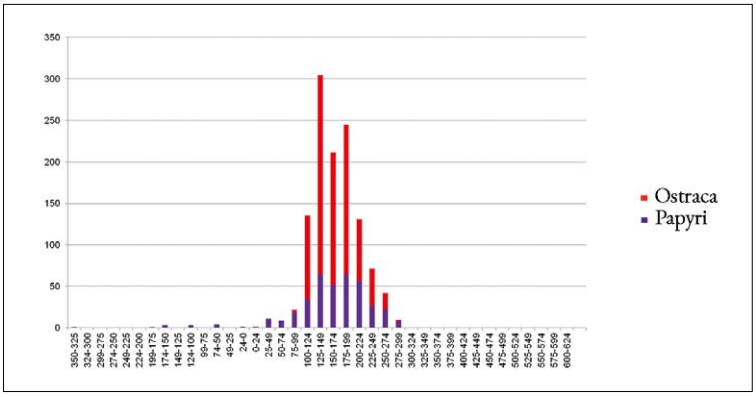

Fig.1 Papyri and ostraca with the word μητρόπολις or μητροπολιτης, (Wojciechowska 2024, 78.)

The privileged position temples and priests enjoyed in the Ptolemaic age, especially in the earlier part of their times, was curtailed soon after the annexation by Rome, to mention

43 Depauw 2003, 102–103; Muhs 2005, 97; Yiftach 2016, 276.
44 Youtie 1975; Depauw 2003; Clarysse 2010, 281.
45 Pierce 1968; Kolb 2018, 321, 237. On *metropoleis* in Ptolemaic times and in Early Empire see Wojciechowska 2024.

only mass confiscation of temple real estate, once allegedly occupying 1/3 of the arable land in the country. What came with that was the shift in the way taxes were collected and processed. In principal taxes were collected in kind, most often in form of grain. The early Imperial age saw a great expansion of attestation of granaries in metropoleis, where grain extracted from Egyptian peasants was stored, rather than in temple-based storage rooms as before. The parallel process was the transformation of notarial practices in Roman Egypt under Roman rule which, in practical terms, necessitated creating, authenticating or registering documents in notarial offices located in metropoleis. In other words, in Roman times, a public notary (*hypographeus*) producing and authenticating documents written in Greek gradually replaced temple-based scribes and priests creating documents in demotic. This resulted in the increased attestation of metropolis, as the place where the *hypographeus* operated.

This paper argues that Egyptian priests in pharaonic and Ptolemaic times were cultic agents, managers, and civic servants of sorts. The reign of Augustus brought both the reduced economic position of Egyptian temples and the shift away from temple as the place where contracts were made and authenticated. This significantly undercut the foundation of social and economic position of priests in Egyptian society. In we add to that the virtual disappearance of top echelons of the priestly class from position of power and privilege they enjoyed in pharaonic and Ptolemaic times, the road to the relative decline of temples and priests in Egypt was wide open. This was of course the beginning of the road only: if measured by temple decoration, under Augustus and Julio-Claudians the imperial patronage of the Egyptian temples matched that of the Ptolemaic kings most active in supporting native shrines. Later it declined significantly, to very low level under the Severi,[46] and the last surviving inscription of an Emperor in an Egyptian temple of Khnum is a hieroglyphic inscription of Trajan Decius.[47] The relative decline of Egyptian temples and priests under early Empire paralleled the rapid expansion of *metropoleis* and the metropolitan class, created in the result of regulations of Augustus.

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46 Clarysse 2010, 276–277.

47 Sauneron 1952: 119; Hallof 2011, 3; Lloyd 2023, 259.

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Religious Lives in the Small Sanctuaries of Hatra: Identities and Practices in Temple III through Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence

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Abstract
This paper explores the variety of religious practices and commemorative acts in Temple III, one of the so-called small sanctuaries in Hatra (northern Iraq, 2nd-3rd centuries CE), through graffiti and other epigraphic and archaeological evidence. While the city is renowned for the prominence of religion in the urban development as much as in the societal mechanisms that regulated the local life, very little is known of the material and temporal aspects of the practices that took place in its sacred spaces. The available archaeological and epigraphic data indicate that the small sanctuaries in the settlement were dedicated to a plurality of deities, including those venerated in the main sanctuary (especially the triad Maren, Marten, and Bar-Maren) but also others, from Mesopotamian and Semitic traditions (Nergol, Baalshamin, Allat, Atargatis, Nanaya, etc.). Their construction and management seem to have been conducted by local families and associations, although local governors could also participate in their foundation. At least part of the activities involved offerings (mostly of incense and oils) and banquets, possibly dedicated to the cult of the ancestors. By carrying out an in-depth analysis integrating architecture and archaeological findings with several inscriptions and textual and pictorial graffiti found on both architecture and objects, this study aims to shed more light on the

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider and Bernard Schneider for their kind invitation to contribute to this volume. This research was made possible by the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust through the Early Career Fellowship project *The Importance of Being Remembered: Memory and Devotion in the Roman Near East* (ECF-2024–170). I am deeply thankful to Roberta Venco Ricciardi, former Professor at the University of Turin and Director of the Missione Archeologica Italiana a Hatra (MAIH), for granting me access to the expedition's archive and allowing me to include its contents in my work. My heartfelt thanks also go to Ted Kaizer (Durham University), Rhiannon Garth Jones (University of Leeds), Jen Baird (Birkbeck, University of London), Marco Moriggi (University of Catania), and Enrico Foietta (University of Turin) for their invaluable insights on the subject of this article and their review of earlier drafts. Any errors are, of course, my sole responsibility.

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multiplicity of activities happening in Temple III and trace the roles and relationships of the people (architects, priests, administrators, painters, worshippers, etc.) who performed them.

Religious Buildings and Practices in a Sacred City

This paper examines the diverse religious and commemorative practices within Temple III in Hatra. The temple, one of the so-called small sanctuaries in the city, bears the greatest quantity of painted, scratched and carved texts on architecture. By bringing together epigraphic and archaeological evidence, and examining the spatial distribution of different forms of interactions and their relationship to the temple's architectural features, this study seeks to reconstruct the range of acts—worship, dedication, remembrance—performed within this space. It also considers the identities and roles of those who carried out these acts, whether as temple personnel or visitors, and the ways in which they expressed affiliation, memory, and devotion.

Hatra is located in the Jazirah, present-day northern Iraq.[2] Most of the visible ruins date back to the early centuries CE, although the site has a much longer history, possibly beginning after the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. The city flourished during the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE and acted as an important political and religious centre in the region, where it was included in a complex network of routes connecting Ctesiphon and the Arab Gulf with Northern Mesopotamia. Hatra emerged especially from the second half of the 2nd century, when it was the capital of a kingdom on the frontier between Rome and Parthia and its rulers controlled a vast area that was mainly inhabited by Arab tribes.[3] The archaeological site, known for its breathtaking religious buildings and the extraordinary repertoire of sculptures and architectural decorative apparatuses, was the first site in Iraq to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1985.[4]

The heart of the city is still occupied by an impressive religious complex, known in literature as Great Temenos or simply Temenos (Figure 1). This enclosure is a slightly irregular rectangle of ca. 450 x 325 m oriented towards the east and embraces the principal temples—at least ten identifiable complexes—built mostly in the 2nd century CE (Figure 2).[5] The prominent position of this sacred enclosure, in the urban landscape and development as well as in the local social and religious life,[6] encouraged the view of Hatra as a sacred space,

2 Pleiades gazetteer (https://pleiades.stoa.org/places/894004, accessed 14–03–25).

3 Kaizer 2013. For a general introduction to the site, see Venco Ricciardi 2000. A comprehensive study of the layout of the city and its territory has been accomplished by Enrico Foietta thanks to an integrated approach combining aerial and satellite images with the topography made by the Missione Archeologica Italiana a Hatra, and the data from the excavations at the site (see Foietta 2018). For further discussion and references on the territory of Hatra, see recently Foietta 2025a.

4 UNESCO World Heritage List (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/277, accessed 14–03–25). On Hatrene sculpture, see mainly: Ingholt 1954; Homès-Fredericq 1963; Safar and Mustafa 1974; al-Shams 1988; Dirven in prep; al-Salihi 2023.

5 Parapetti and Venco Ricciardi 2000; 2013; Foietta 2018, 349–74.

6 Jakubiak 2014; Foietta 2018.

Figure 1 Map of Hatra showing the main features of the settlement and the buildings investigated (elaborated from Foietta 2018, fig. 122).

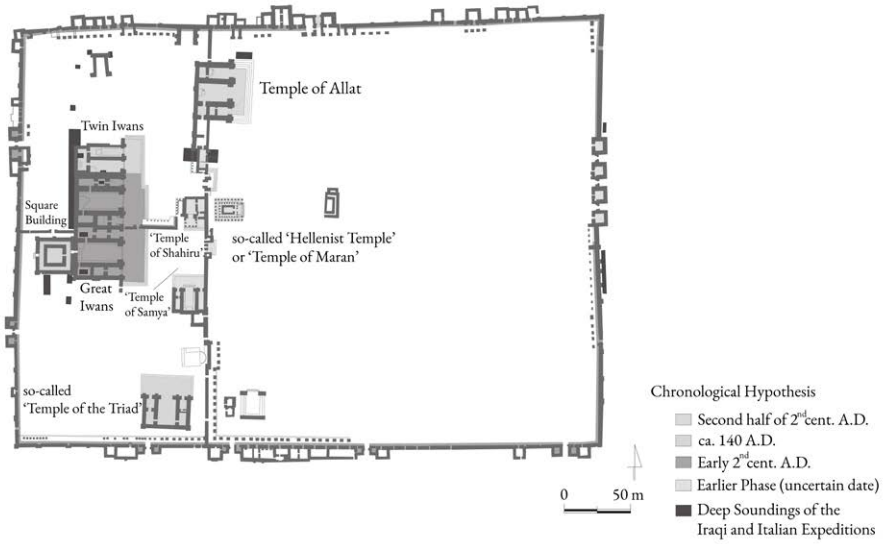

Figure 2 General plan of the Great Temenos. Different colours highlight the main phases of the sanctuary (courtesy Missione Archeologica Italiana a Hatra).

further supported by numismatic (*ḥṭr' dšmš* 'enclosure/estate of Shamash')[7] and epigraphic evidence, including four legal texts at the city gates (H 336, 342, 343, 344).[8] In addition to the main sanctuary, fourteen small temples were excavated in the settlement by the local Directorate of Antiquities, conventionally numbered according to the order of their discovery (I–XIV).[9] These mostly present a reversed T plan, the so-called 'Babylonian' ground plan, and feature a broad pronaos and a small square naos (e.g., Temples III and IV). Some variability can be noticed in their plans, for instance in the duplication of the pronaos (e.g., Temples XIII and XIV) or the different shape and size of the naos (e.g., Temples VI and XII).[10] The attribution of these buildings remains, for the most part, elusive. While some of the larger structures within the Temenos may have been dedicated to individual deities, the smaller temples appear to have been associated with the worship of a plurality of divine beings.

Current evidence offers only a limited understanding of the local hierarchy of religious officials and the practices conducted within the city's sacred spaces—including their mate-

7 On Hatra's coins, see Walker 1958; Slocum 1977; Gaslain 2009; Heidemann and Butcher 2017, 13–21. Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider has recently proposed a slightly different interpretation of the term *ḥṭr'* as 'estate' instead of 'enclosure', tracing its origin back to the local Achaemenid administration of the region (Kubiak-Schneider 2022, 793–7). On religious life in Hatra, see Kaizer 2000.

8 Kaizer 2006. On the history and analysis of the scholarly notion of Hatra as a 'Pre-Islamic Mecca', see Dirven 2006–2007.

9 Three more small temples—unexcavated—have been tentatively identified thanks to remote sensing analysis (Foietta 2018, 357).

10 For a survey of the features of small temples in Hatra, see Foietta 2025b.

rial and temporal aspects—and even less about their emotional dimensions.[11] For example, a small number of titles referring to professions with religious connotations are attested in epigraphy—e.g., *kmr'* ('priest'), *kmr' rb* ('great priest'), *'pkl'* (most likely a 'high priest' or a high religious official), and *rbyt'* ('major-domo')—mostly in inscriptions on architecture, bases of statues, and altars.[12] It is often impossible to define the exact nature of these roles; it seems likely that some of them, such as that of *rbyt'*, may have encompassed both religious and secular responsibilities, depending on the context.[13] Material and iconographic evidence, on the other hand, provide depictions of religious life, including offerings made by priestly figures wearing a distinctive attire. This typically consists of a knee-length tunic, a mantle draped across the body, bare lower legs, and often a tall, pointed headdress.[14] The costume bears notable similarities to that worn by priestly figures in Palmyra and across Greater Syria, suggesting the possibility of a shared visual convention for representing religious officials and their roles.[15] Both priests and worshippers in Hatra are shown drawing incense from a small cylindrical container or offering it atop small altars of various shapes.[16] Celebrations in temples also involved musicians, singers, and dancers, who are mentioned in inscriptions from a range of contexts, sometimes specifically associated with the cult of a particular deity.[17] Additionally, female musicians—especially tambourine players—and dancers are depicted in sculpture and graffiti, usually in relation to goddesses such as Atargatis, Allat, and Nanaya.[18] Lastly, the sensory dimensions of cultic practices was probably enriched by the use of small bells to adorn the cultic standards that were carried in processions. Four bells made of copper alloys, possibly originally belonging to such standards, were found in the area of the Great Temenos, some of which were inscribed.[19]

11 See Downey 1988, 159–73 for a wide overview.

12 Vattioni 1994, 7–12.

13 Marcato 2015.

14 Dirven 2008, 223–7.

15 On priestly figures in Palmyra, see Raja 2016; 2017. In Greater Syria, see the examples in the corpus in Blömer 2014 and Blömer 2015 specifically on portraits of priests.

16 E.g., Safar and Mustafa 1974, figs 139, 257, 302. The burning of incense was also the most common type of sacrifice known in Palmyra, together with the pouring of liquids (libations) (Kaizer 2002, 177–8; 2008, 180–3).

17 Vattioni 1994, 11–2. See Foietta 2019 for those mentioned in inscriptions on altars.

18 Tambourine players: small statue from Temple I (Safar and Mustafa 1974, fig. 174; inscription H 5, Vattioni 1981, 25–6; Aggoula 1991, 4–5; Beyer 1998, 29); central scene of the so-called 'musicians' frieze' in the Temple of Allat, where a player accompanies the goddess symbolically arriving in the city (al-Najafi 1981, figs 4–5; al-Salihi 1985, 135, figs 38–40; Invernizzi 1989, 134); figures of tambourine players are included among the musicians in the same frieze (al-Najafi 1981, fig. 8); relief in the wall of the second pronaos in Temple XIV, dedicated to Nanaya (al-Aswad 2013, 109, fig. 36). Dancers: fragmentary naked statue from the Great Temenos adorned by a necklace and two chains crossed over the breasts, identified as dancer or prostitute (Safar and Mustafa 1974, 111, fig. 85); fragment of mural painting from the house adjacent to Temple II, identified as a dancer with a transparent dress (Safar and Mustafa 1974, fig. 196). For discussion of female dancers and musicians depicted in graffiti, see Venco Ricciardi 2004, 214–7, figs 10–14.

19 On Hatrene standards, see Dirven 2005b. On the bells found in the area of the Temenos were published in Safar and Mustafa 1974, 173, fig. 166. On the corresponding texts, see Aggoula 1991,

As mentioned, the available archaeological and epigraphic evidence suggests that the smaller sanctuaries in Hatra were dedicated to multiple deities. These included both those venerated in the main sanctuary—particularly the triad identified with the Aramaic titles of Maren, Marten, and Bar-Maren—and others such as Nergol, Nanaya, Baalshamin, and Atargatis from Mesopotamian and Semitic traditions. Their construction and management appear to have been undertaken by local families and associations, although local governors could also play a role in their foundation.[20] Some of the ritual activities carried out in these spaces involved offerings, especially of incense and oils, and communal banquets. As Lucinda Dirven has argued, these banquets, possibly connected to cults of the ancestors, took place in the broad pronaoi surrounded by low benches or in the subsidiary rooms.[21] Excavations have brought to light a rich assemblage of sculptures (including statues, stelae, altars, and architectural decoration) and inscriptions, offering a glimpse into the complexity and diversity of religious life in the city.[22] In addition, a number of texts and images that can be classified as graffiti offer valuable insights into the personal and communal dimensions of cultic practice. These markings—scratched, carved, or painted—appear in the city on the walls of temples, houses, and military buildings, and occasionally on objects such as altars, pottery, and statues. While the term 'graffiti' remains the subject of debate—due largely to its modern associations and the lack of disciplinary consensus—it continues to function as a useful heuristic when applied with flexibility and attention to materiality and context. While our classificatory frameworks should approximate the ways in which such marks were perceived within their original contexts of production and reception, this aim is complicated by the limited evidence for ancient conceptual categories, the likely fluidity of such perceptions, and variations across regions and time periods. Recent scholarship has therefore moved away from typological definitions based solely on technique or quality, instead stressing the value of graffiti as evidence of individual agency and engagement with the built and natural environment.[23] At Hatra, these markings are diverse in their technique, size, content, and placement, but share a key feature: they constitute intentional acts that reflect direct engagement with the sacred and social space, emerging from individual or collective devotional practice, commemoration, or communication.[24] When considered within their context alongside other material and textual evidence, these marks contribute a more nuanced reconstruction of the social and religious life of the city and illustrate how people interacted with architecture, objects, and other individuals.[25]

Graffiti in religious buildings in Hatra are predominantly textual, with a very limited number of pictorial examples. This discrepancy signals a clear pattern of distribution

177–8, nos. 13–16; Vattioni 1994, 89, nos. 05–08; Beyer 1998, H 1007–1010.

20 See Kubiak-Schneider in this volume.

21 Dirven 2005a. The only unquestionable proof for banquets in Hatra come from Temple XIII (H 408). On banquets in the larger temples in the city, see Kubiak-Schneider and Schneider 2023.

22 See especially Safar and Mustafa 1974.

23 Baird and Taylor 2011a; Ragazzoli et al. 2018; Stern 2018; Škrabal et al. 2023.

24 Cf. graffiti at Dura-Europos (Baird 2018).

25 Bucci 2023. On the published graffiti from Hatra, see mainly: Venco Ricciardi 1998; 2004; Bertolino 2003; 2013; Bucci 2016; Moriggi and Bucci 2019; Moriggi 2019; 2020–2021.

and helps us better understand their function in context. Graffiti in temples are mainly commemorative: they use customary remembrance formulae and address the deities of the local pantheon. Their authors present themselves with their name and patronymic and, albeit less frequently, with their titles. They want to leave their mark, penetrate in the place they are inscribing, be identified and remembered forever. Hence, graffiti act as both acts of devotion and as identifiers: they mean to attest one's presence in a public place and express personal and kin identity, especially where members of the same family write on the same surface or in the same room. At the same time, however, they also very clearly materialise the beliefs and devotion of the individuals who made them.

Graffiti and Writing Agencies in Hatra

Before delving into Temple III, it is necessary to provide some introductory remarks on the textual graffiti found in Hatra. Their predominant language is the local Aramaic dialect; only three graffiti are currently known to be written in Greek.[26] Hatran Aramaic is attested epigraphically in over six hundred texts from the city itself and the neighbouring regions.[27] Texts from Hatra cover a timespan that goes from the middle of the 1st century CE to the middle of the 3rd century CE (55–239/240 CE), though only a limited number of inscriptions can be dated with precision, either through explicit dates or references to identifiable figures such as local rulers.[28] Palaeography remains a complex issue to tackle. If the execution of Hatran texts displays significant heterogeneity, even among those considered 'official inscriptions', and letters show some variability in shape, there is no consensus in scholarship on the existence and employment of different writing styles and on the evolution of the Hatran script. The available evidence does not seem to justify, for instance, a strict distinction between a formal, official style and a cursive one.[29] According to a tradition inherent to Aramaic epigraphy as a whole, textual graffiti were not included in sub-categories or seen as opposed or complementary to more official or monumental lapidary texts,[30] although many of them were excluded from publication due to their lower quality and legibility. If compared to pictorial graffiti, techniques of execution and sup-

26 Moriggi and Bucci 2019, 27–9; Bucci et al. 2025.

27 On Hatran language and script see Healey 2009, 27, 47–9; Bertolino 2008; Gzella 2015, 271–6; Moriggi 2013; 2020. On Hatran onomastics see Marcato 2018. Aramaic inscriptions from the site were primarily published in the volumes of the journal *Sumer*, following a series initiated by Safar in 1951, and later included in the main editions of the epigraphic corpus (Vattioni 1981; Aggoula 1991; Vattioni 1994; Beyer 1998; 2002; 2013). However, a comprehensive re-edition of the entire corpus remains necessary (Moriggi and Bucci 2019, 6). Aramaic texts from Hatra have been designated with the letter 'H' since Beyer 1998. For the classification and numbering of Hatran texts, see Moriggi and Bucci 2019, 3–6.

28 Foietta 2018, 443–7.

29 Bertolino 2008, 21–36; 2013, 187–8. *Contra* Bertolino see Healey 2009, 32 ("Only one rather cursive form of script is attested") and Moriggi and Bucci 2019, 8–9.

30 This is what happened, for instance, with the texts in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* IV.

Figure 3 Different types of graffiti from Hatra: remembrance graffiti carved on blocks at the North Gate (a); image of a radiate god incised on the torso of a male statue from Temple VI (b); inscriptions H 1055a–g painted (after firing) on a ceramic stand from the North Street (c); pictorial and textual graffiti on the east wall of room 46, House of Maʿnu (courtesy Missione Archeologica Italiana a Hatra).

ports are more varied and include scratching, incising, carving, and painting on supports such as wall plaster, limestone blocks, floor slabs, statues, altars and offering boxes, metal objects, and pottery vessels (Figure 3). Like pictorial depictions, on the other hand, textual graffiti vary substantially in size, from small inscriptions and labels only a few centimetres long to large texts carved on stone blocks. Their dimension does not necessarily depend on the technique employed (e.g., scratched as opposed to carved or painted), although for obvious technical reasons texts cut into stone tend to be larger than those scratched onto plaster. What we notice of the appearance of a graffito, varying immensely from one specimen to the other, is hence deeply intertwined with support, technique, type of message, and location but also depends on the underlying social practices associated with a certain environment. In some instances, we can clearly see that texts imitate other supports, such as in the case of the painted text H 25 from Temple III (Figure 14) whose frame imitates a wooden board, recalling objects that very likely originally existed in Hatra.

If texts in Hatra display a wide range of types, including building inscriptions, legal texts, dedications on statues, altars, and architecture, etc.,[31] the majority of what we can classify as graffiti are short, and their content is eminently commemorative. Commemorations can include different variants of the *dkyr* formula but also include blessings or can be reduced to the simple mention of the name. On the other hand, the well-known formula 'for the life of' (*ʿl ḥyy*), that appears with variants at least fifty times in the corpus (especially on dedication of statues), is missing.[32] This formula typically refers to individuals other than—or in addition to—the dedicator, framing the inscription as an act of honour and

31 Beyer 1998, 141–2. See further observations in Moriggi and Bucci 2019, 8.

32 On this formula see mainly Dijkstra 1995. For attestations in Hatra, Beyer 1998, 175.

benefit directed toward someone else. It serves to establish a relationship between the dedicator and one or more beneficiaries: the individuals on whose behalf, or for whose life, the dedication was made. Its absence here likely reflects the highly personal nature of graffiti. Remembrance formulae are intended to commemorate the individual (or individuals) mentioned for their own personal sake and are therefore direct messages and requests in front of the gods. Even when texts are longer (e.g., H 25, 1015, 1117), this is mainly because they present more articulated versions of remembrance formulas, sequence of deities, and curses. Commemorative formulae in Hatra are mainly variants of *dkyr* + *lṭb* + PN + *qdm* + DN ("May be remembered for good PN in front of DN") and are usually understood as religious statements and invocations recording the presence of their authors and soliciting the attentions and remembrances of the passers-by. Such formulae—omnipresent in Hatra, rather than only in religious contexts—find parallels in other Aramaic varieties[33] and have equivalents in Greek (so-called μνησθῇ/mnēsthē graffiti).[34] Even when the preposition *qdm* is absent, a divine audience is probably implied.[35] Remembrance formulae also appear in the dedications of statues and reliefs in addition to or instead of other offering formulae.[36] When used in graffiti the formula *dkyr* is sometimes preceded by the asseverative particle *bl* that probably had the meaning of 'indeed!'.[37] People usually identify themselves using their personal name and patronymic, which allows the reconstruction of some prosopographical links among the individuals mentioned in graffiti from the same context (see *infra*). Only seldom are they also accompanied by a title, which is either theirs or that of an illustrious ancestor. Regardless of their title and social status, what all these people mainly do is mark their presence in a place and ask to be remembered before the gods, especially in temple complexes and at the city gates. The main deity invoked is beyond doubt Maren, the head of the local pantheon, who is the most attested in all the contexts considered. It is possible that Maren was used as shorthand for the Hatrene religion.[38] That the dedicants of these texts wanted to ensure themselves the maximum possible protection is evident when they use a formula that includes 'all the gods' (e.g., H 23, 173, 184, 431).[39] The original aspect is that, more than other texts, graffiti seem to privilege invocations to sequences of gods, such as the case of H 52 and 74 ('Maren, Marten, Bar-Maren, Allat, and all the Standards'). These lists of gods appear, in most cases, to be sensitive to their topographical context, and therefore include deities who are particularly relevant to the specific location in which they were inscribed. Notable examples include references to Baalshamin in Temple III (see *infra*), and to 'the Gad of the Gate' at the North and East Gates.

33 Healey 1996; De Hemmer Gudme 2013; 2017.

34 Stern 2012, 178–81; Baird 2016, 16–8.

35 Remembrances and acclamations suggest that audiences include the divinities themselves (cf. temples at Dura-Europos, Stern 2014).

36 Examples bases of statues: H 69, 146, 296, 401, 1037b, 1044b-c, 1047. Beyer 1998, 173–4; al-Jadir 2006, 308.

37 Beyer 1998, 170.

38 Bucci et al. 2025.

39 This corresponds to broader patterns in the Graeco-Roman world; for discussion and examples, see Versnel 1981, 13.

It has often been argued that textual graffiti do not refer to other graffiti, especially to pictorial specimens traced on the same surface,[40] a statement that has somehow limited the potential of approaches based on dialogue and interaction among different forms of writing and drawing and with their context. Contrary to previous assumptions, what graffiti mainly do is to express a dynamic relation with other graffiti, especially when on the same surface or in the same room. If this relation may not be obvious at first, a subtler dialogue can be usually identified. Examples are clusters of similar texts, especially commemorative, in many public spaces of the city, but also the many images and texts scratched on the same wall in residential buildings.[41] This is without considering that obvious connections between pictorial and textual graffiti can indeed be recognised. A clear example is that of the offering box from Temple I. On the lid is the short text H 7 mentioning the 'box (*dkt'*) of *knzyw*' and to its right a male figure carrying what seems to be a money bag. The man raises his right hand as in the act of inviting the visitors to the temple to put an offering into the box.[42]

The occurrence of acts of writing on so many supports allows us to explore important aspects of their production. The variety of support types not only indicates which surfaces were considered suitable for writing and how the authors of graffiti engaged with their built environment, but also implicitly reveals different strategies of execution and degrees of intentionality. Multiple forms of agency and modes of production could coexist within the same setting, offering insight into the temporality and sociability of these acts—whether spontaneous or planned, solitary or shared. For instance, scratching a small text into wall plaster would have been easier and quicker than carving a text of similar size on a stone doorjamb within the same room. Carving a large text on a limestone block on the walls of the city's defences would have taken a long time but could have been realised with metal tools that were probably made available to soldiers and military personnel at these places. Painting a small or a large text on a wall in a temple would have been quicker but it would also have required a set of tools that not everyone would have owned or carried with them. Therefore, in addition to the amount of time that these actions would have taken, we should also be mindful of the set of skills and tools that their authors would have needed. From the analysis of textual graffiti emerges a spectrum of practices characterised by different agencies and sometimes it is clear that a person is writing on behalf of another. This may happen when one person writes on behalf of himself and his fellows (companions, other members of the same association, etc.), such as in H 1015 in Temple III, or (probably) for a commissioner, such as in H 24a–e from the same temple (see *infra*). Finally, thinking about the processes of production of these texts also leads to their audience and to aspects of sociability, as we need to imagine that they were not only visible to a more or less extended group of people once completed, but that their very making was a visible and potentially sociable event.

40 Bertolino 2003, 64; 2013, 188; Moriggi 2013a, 38, 40.

41 See the of room S15 in the Building A (Venco Ricciardi 2004; Bucci 2023).

42 Bucci, Marchetti and Moriggi 2021, 85, no. 20. For further examples see Moriggi and Bucci 2019, 32–3.

Figure 4 View of Temples III and IV from the roof of the Square Building, photograph taken in 1988 (courtesy Missione Archeologica Italiana a Hatra).

Figure 5 View of the east façade of Temple III, photograph taken in 1996 (courtesy Missione Archeologica Italiana a Hatra).

Temple III in Context: Reassessing the Epigraphic and Archaeological Record

Temple III is one of the small shrines excavated during the first campaign in 1951 by the Directorate General of Antiquities of Iraq (now the State Board of Antiquities and

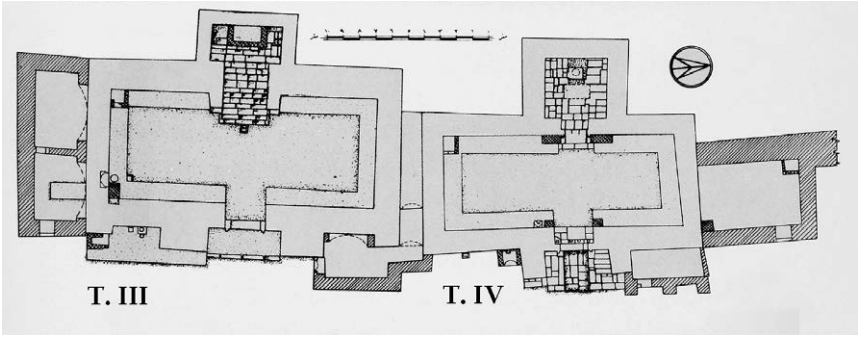

Figure 6 Plan of Temples III and IV (Safar and Mustafa 1974, 355).

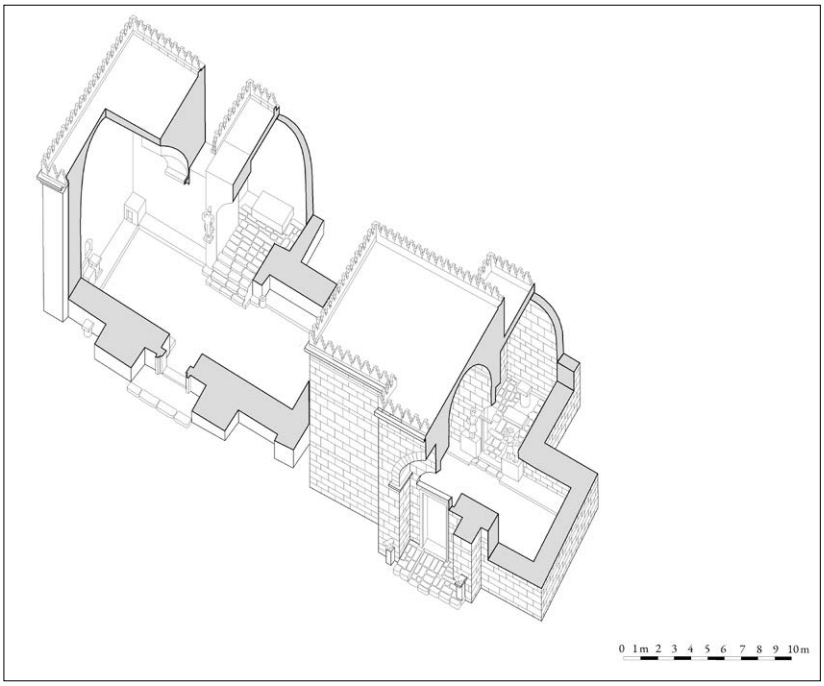

Figure 7 Axonometric reconstruction of Temples III and IV based on Safar and Mustafa 1974 (elaborated by Claudio Fossati; courtesy Missione Archeologica Italiana a Hatra).

Heritage, SBAH).[43] It is located west of the Great Temenos and is adjacent to Temple IV to the north (Figure 4). Both were directly accessible from the street bordering the main sanctuary and underwent several architectural phases which cannot be dated precisely due to the lack of dated inscriptions.[44] The plan of Temple III features a large pronaos (16.50 × 7.10 m), bordered on all sides by low benches coated in plaster, and a square, projecting naos (4.35 × 2.35 m) (Figures 6–7). The pronaos was accessed via a single doorway in the east wall and was roofed with a barrel vault supported by two main east–west arches. The naos is paved with marble slabs and stands at a higher level than the pronaos, accessible via a short flight of steps. At a later stage, a wall was added to the northern part of the façade to connect it with Temple IV, thereby creating a room that housed the staircase giving access to the roof, along with two smaller rooms to the south (Figure 6). These southern rooms appear to have been linked to the cultic activities of the temple. One contained a low platform, while in the other a small coin hoard was discovered—possibly the remnants of the temple treasury (?). The temple façade was reinforced with buttresses, and the space between the southern pilasters was used as a small, open-air shrine, accessed through a low platform, and similar to that found outside Temple IV. Within this area, several cult-related features were identified, including altars and a copper-alloy mask depicting a Medusa figure, inscribed with H 291 (Figures 5, 9). Inside the pronaos, two niches seemingly connected to a platform and a column altar were discovered in the south-east corner (on the east and south wall respectively), associated with offerings and perhaps ablution rituals, along with a stone cassette in the south-west corner. Just east of the steps leading up to the small naos, a shallow basin with a central hole was set into the floor (Figure 8)—likely intended to receive liquid offerings made while being (standing, sitting, or kneeling) in front of the naos, where cult images were in all probability once displayed. The remains of four columns with Doric capitals were also found in the pronaos. However, it is still unclear whether these originally supported a canopy over the naos or served a different architectural or ritual function.[45] A column-shaped altar also appears to have been discovered adjacent to the north wall, near the north-west corner. Unfortunately, the architectural features, cult installations, and finds other than the sculptures have never been comprehensively published, which continues to limit our broader understanding of the temple and its use. The information in this article has therefore been based on both the published material and the unpublished documentation preserved in the archives of the Missione Archeologica Italiana in Turin. This includes copies of the original records produced during the 1950s excavations—generously shared with the director of the mission during the

43 Safar 1952, 13.

44 Safar and Mustafa 1974, 354–5; Ibrahim 1986, 129; Jakubiak 2014, 74–80. On the placement of the small temples directly along the 'circumvallation' of the Temenos, and their relationship to patterns of use and pilgrim movement between the main sanctuary and surrounding religious structures, see Foietta 2025a.

45 Dirven in prep.

Figure 8 Temple III viewed from the south during excavations (Safar and Mustafa 1974, fig. 342).

Italian team's work on site—as well as documentation generated by the Turin team between 1986 and the early 2000s.[46]

Temples III and IV are known in literature as the Temples of Baalshamin and Atargatis, denominations that are based mainly on the epigraphic content of the texts found at these locations. Unfortunately, no cult statue depicting either deity has been discovered. However, the graffito from Temple III—showing a goddess in Greek dress standing on a low plinth and holding a sceptre on the top of which is perched a bird—could mirror a cult statue that

46 For an introduction to the archive of the Missione Archaeologica Italiana a Hatra, see Moriggi and Bucci 2019, 17–21.

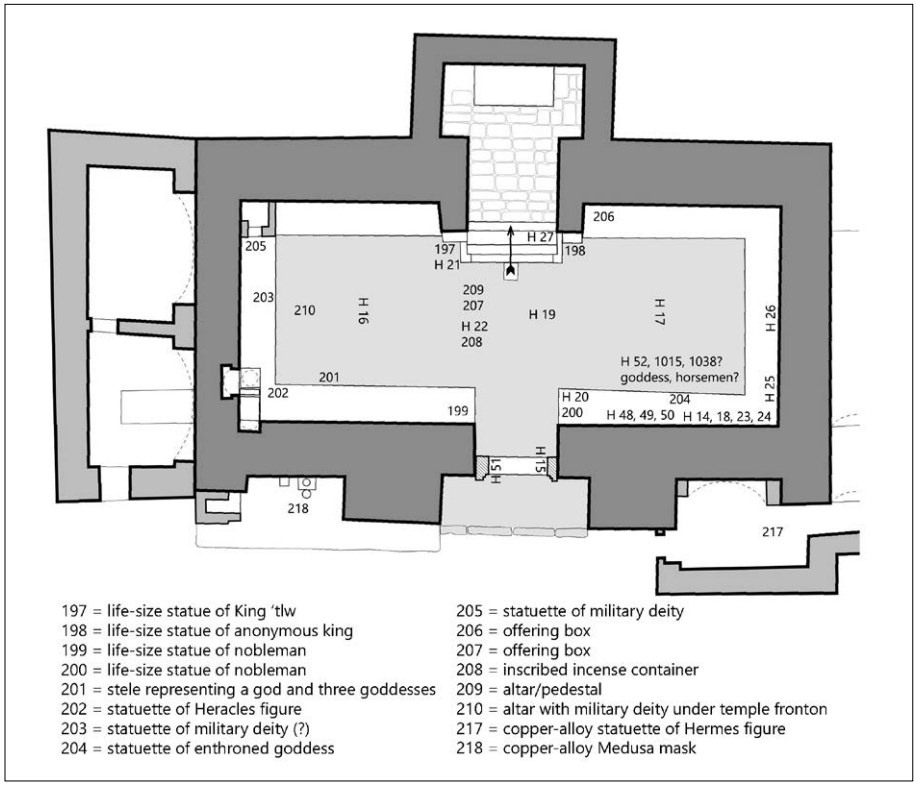

Figure 9 Plan of Temple III showing the findspots of inscriptions (H) and artefacts, with a list of the artefact numbers published in Safar and Mustafa 1974 (elaborated by the author from plan courtesy Missione Archeologica Italiana a Hatra).

once stood in Temple IV or III (Figure 10).[47] If it is usually assumed that these shrines were complementary, it is also possible that, rather than being dedicated to two distinct deities, they were both dedicated to Baalshamin and Atargatis but destined to different groups of people.[48] The few individuals mentioned in Temple IV (epitaph H 30) do not overlap with those attested in Temple III (see *infra*), a datum that appears to support this interpretation. The building technique of these complexes also slightly differs, with Temple III being constructed on a high basement of stone blocks with an elevation in mudbricks, and Temple IV being erected largely in stone, using ashlar masonry and roughly cut blocks and rubble in the upper part of the walls, which might reflect a different chronology. Baalshamin is mentioned in Temple III, individually (H 16a–b, 17), or with the Hatrene triad (H

47 The only pictorial graffito published in Safar and Mustafa 1974 (page 402) is the figure of Atargatis from this temple.

48 Dirven in prep.

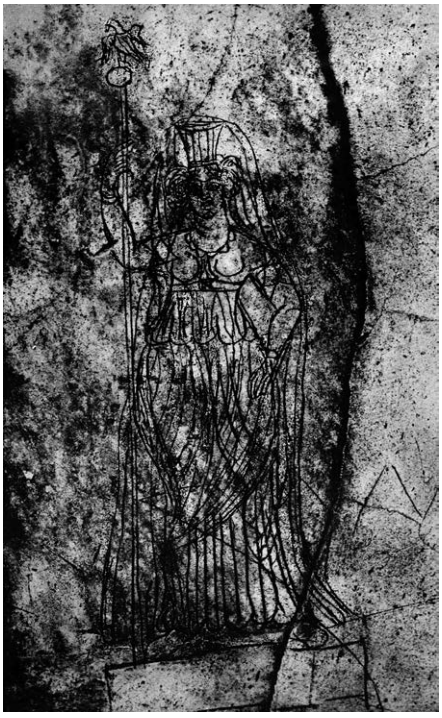

Figure 10 Graffito depicting a goddess in Greek costume (Safar and Mustafa 1974, 402).

25), Maren (H 24a), and all the gods (H 23). The fact that the god is listed after the triad and after Maren suggests the existence of a defined hierarchy within the local pantheon—even in a building likely dedicated to his cult—highlighting his subordinate position in comparison to Maren and the triad. Baalshamin's absence elsewhere in the city, together with the references in H 16a to the major-domo of Baalshamin and in H 49 to the 'House of Baalshamin,' further supports the attribution of Temple III to the cult of this god. Both Baalshamin and Atargatis are also named together with the triad and Shahiru in two curses—one on a stone block and one on a statue base—from Temple IV (H 29–30), indicating that these deities may have had a place in this building as well. Krzysztof Jakubiak has suggested that Temples III and IV were primarily intended for pilgrims and visitors to Hatra who were not permitted entry into the Great Temenos, given the temple's location just outside one of its western gates—an arrangement comparable to that of Temples I and II on the southern side.[49] While this remains a plausible interpretation, especially supported by one of the life-size statues discovered (see *infra*), a closer analysis of the graffiti and associated evidence from Temple III provides further insight into the identity of those who frequented this space and engaged with it—commissioning images and texts and leaving short texts and drawings—and reveal that they mainly belonged to local families of priests and temple administrators.

A total of twenty-two Aramaic inscriptions were discovered within the building (see Appendix), along with four life-size statues, four statuettes and one stela depicting deities, two copper-alloy sculptures, a Medusa mask and a Hermes figure), two offering boxes, an incense container, and two altars (see original findspots on the plan in Figure 9).[50] Two life-size statues of kings were mounted on tall brackets affixed to the wall, approximately two metres above the floor, positioned on either side of the naos. Opposite them, on the other side of the room, stood two additional life-size statues of noblemen, also placed on brackets (Figures 11–12). Of these statues, only two bear inscriptions both on their bases and brackets (H 20–

49 Jakubiak 2014, 143.

50 Safar and Mustafa 1974, 208–17, figs 197–210. The findspots of the artefacts have been reconstructed using both the plan on p. 371 and archival documentation from the Italian expedition.

21). One in particular, originally situated to the left of the naos, portrays a royal figure dressed in an elaborately decorated costume and wearing a royal tiara. The accompanying inscription identifies him as *'tlw* (Figure 11). This is the only known attestation of this ruler in Hatra. As he appears to be associated with a territory that can be identified with the ancient kingdom of Adiabene, the statue likely represents a dedication made in honour of a foreign ruler within one of the smaller temples of the city. However, the identity of the dedicator (perhaps *'tlw* himself?), as well as the specific circumstances and motivations behind this dedication, remain unknown. Together with evidence for the presence of other foreigners, perhaps also from Adiabene (see individuals mentioned in H 113–114), this has been interpreted as a reflection of Hatra's role as an interregional sanctuary during the third century CE and as a sign of the peaceful collaboration between the kings of Hatrene and Adiabene in the same period.[51] Of the sculptures representing deities, a stela depicts a god accompanied by three goddesses, all shown in Greek attire, while the remaining statuettes depict military deities, a small Herakles figure, and a seated

Figure 11 Statue of King *'tlw*, originally located on the southern bracket of the west wall of the pronaos, to the left of the entrance to the naos (Safar and Mustafa 1974, fig. 197).

Figure 12 Statue of an anonymous nobleman, originally placed on the southern bracket of the east wall of the pronaos (Safar and Mustafa 1974, fig. 199).

51 For further discussion and references concerning this statue and inscription, see Marciak 2017, 323–5, 392–4 and Pennacchietti 2019. Other examples of dedications and offerings by foreigners to Hatra include the Palmyrene objects and inscritpions found in Temple XIII, as well as those dedicated by the Roman military in Temple IX during the final years of the city prior to the Sasanian conquest (Jakubiak 2014). The presence of such material in at least three small shrines indicates that foreign communities could worship and make dedications within the sacred centre, sharing space alongside the local population.

Figure 13 Photograph of H 16a–b (Safar and Mustafa 1974, 416).

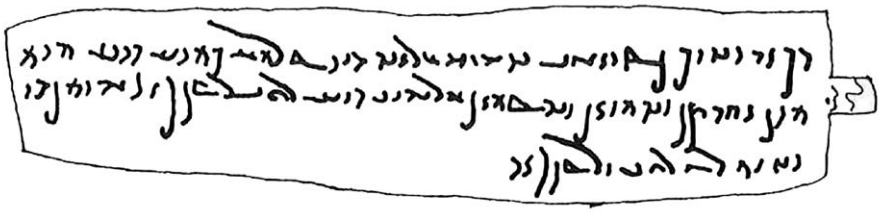

Figure 14 Line tracing of H 25 (Aggoula 1991, 21).

goddess.[52] Unfortunately, these figures offer little further insight into the identification of additional deities worshipped in the temple.

What is particularly remarkable about this sanctuary is the abundance of epigraphic material, executed using various techniques and primarily inscribed on the architectural surfaces. As a matter of fact Temple III contains the highest concentration of architectural graffiti among the small temples. It is also the only one to feature pictorial graffiti on its architecture—most notably, depictions of a standing goddess and of mounted horsemen—although the exact locations of these images within the complex remain uncertain. A few of the texts fall into types and supports common in the temples of Hatra, such as H 20–21 inscribed on the bases of male statues (see *supra*), H 22 on an incense container offered as a votive gift, and H 291 on a copper-alloy mask depicting a Medusa figure. In contrast, eighteen texts (H 14–19, 23–27, 48–52,[53] 1015, 1038) provide intriguing insights into graffiti definitions and taxonomies, and the complex of writing practices—in terms of materiality, visibility, and modes of production—occurring in a small religious building in Hatra. Eight of them were painted in red ochre (H 16a–b, 17, 18) (Figure 13) or black (H 23, 24a–e,

52 Safar and Mustafa 1974, 214–6, figs. 201–205.

53 Inscriptions H 48–52 were originally uncovered in 1951 but only later became legible following the dissolution of salt crusts by rain (Safar 1953, 241).

25, 26, 27) (Figure 14); seven were incised into the wall plaster (H 14, 48, 49, 50, 52, 1015, 1038) (Figure 15); H 15 and 51 were engraved on limestone, on the north and south sides of the pronaos entrance; and H 19 was engraved on a slab found in the debris inside the pronaos. The size of these texts varies considerably, ranging from as small as 6 cm (as in the shortest line of H 27) to as large as 140 cm (H 14). Painted texts measure between 6–15 cm and 110 cm; incised texts on wall plaster range from 26 cm to 140 cm; and those carved into stone fall between 30 cm and 57 cm. While size is not the only factor to consider, it remains a significant one. Texts engraved or carved in stone were mostly framed by the size of their support (doorjamb, statue base, bracket). Painted texts show a broader range, but apart from H 16 and H 17, the majority measure under 50 cm in length. The greatest variation is found among texts incised on wall plaster, with some reaching sizes between approximately 90 and 140 cm (H 14, 48, and 49), significantly larger than most graffiti in the city. In general, the larger and more prominently positioned a text—whether painted, carved, or incised—the greater the investment it reflects in terms of time, skills, and resources. This applies not only to painted and engraved inscriptions, which likely required the services of a professional, but also to more carefully executed graffiti. Size and visibility also directly shape audience engagement: a prominently placed inscription is more likely to be seen and understood as a purposeful message directed at those entering or moving through the space. In this way, the prominence of a text contributes not only to the spatial dynamics of the building but also to its social and communicative functions.

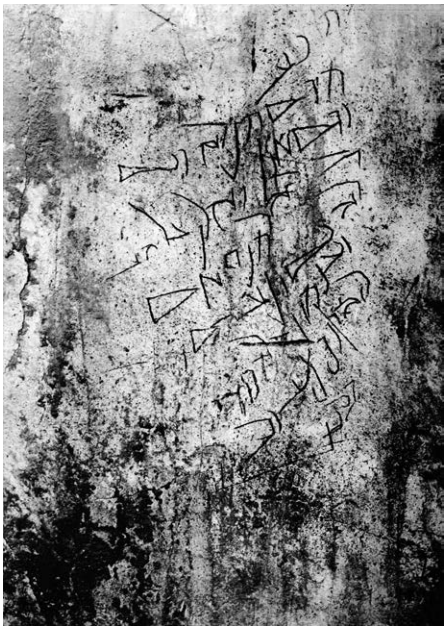

Figure 15 Photograph of H 1015 (Safar and Mustafa 1974, 419).

Unfortunately, it is not possible to reconstruct the precise placement or original height of all the texts with certainty. However, based on the available published material and archival documentation, we can approximate the areas in which many of them were located (Figure 9, Table 1). The majority of inscriptions were clustered in the northern part of the east wall (H 14, 18, 23, 24a–e, and 48–50), which contained the highest number of texts on wall and one of the inscribed statues (H20). Adding to this cluster, H 25 was located on the eastern section of the north wall and H 26 in its central section. The remaining texts were located on the north and south arch of the vault (H 17, 16a–b), on the north and south jambs of the entrance door (H 15, 51), and on the entrance to the naos (H 27). The documentation also indicates that at least some inscriptions were placed at eye level. One graffito (H 52) was recorded at 75 cm above the bench, suggesting it was carved while the author was seating or kneeling.

Table 1. Distribution of textual and pictorial graffiti by technique and medium in Temple III.

Location	Incised on wall plaster	Painted on wall plaster	Carved on stone architectural element	Engraved on object (stone or metal)
Entrance door			H 15, 51	
Pronaos	H 14, 48, 49, 50, 52, 1015, image of goddess	H 16a–b, 17, 18, 23, 24a–e, 25, 26	H 20, 21 (statue brackets)	H 19 (block), 22 (container)
Entrance naos		H 27		
Adjacent rooms				H 291 (mask)
Not determinable	H 1038, images of horsemen			

Most of the graffiti are commemorative (15 of 18), including a remembrance formula, but the cluster features a wider variety including an alphabetic list H 14,[54] and the record of an economic transaction (H 49). The latter seems to commemorate the stipulation and fulfilment of a contract or a bill regarding temple expenses and involving two individuals (the writer and *ʿqbn* son of *ʿqb*). However, due to the absence of legible photographs, its content is not fully clear in the available editions. The graffito records at least two dates (in the month of Tišrī-September/October and in that of Ṭ̲ēṯ- December/January) which respectively seem to concern the stipulation and payment of a contract agreed by the administrator to the temple (*ʿqbn* son of *ʿqb*) and a benefactor or a contractor (?), the second being the author of the graffito. The creation of such a large graffito (with the second-longest line measuring nearly 90 cm) was probably intended to invoke the god or gods of the temple as guarantors of the successful fulfilment of the transaction. This intention is further supported by the fact that the final line of the graffito (l. 4), which seals the conclusion of the agreement, appears somewhat isolated from the preceding lines—suggesting that the two parts were written at different times.

From these texts in the temple, we learn that at least some of them were meant to be read aloud (e.g., H 24d "May be remembered for good everyone who will say (the remembrance)") and that whoever dared not to comply was destined to face the fate of the curse (*bgn*) of Maren (H 1015) or of Shahiru (H 23). In one case, a bad remembrance (the formula is *dkyr lbyš*) is wished for them, particularly for anyone that would remove the text (H 24e). The practice of reading aloud finds other attestations outside Temple III (e.g., H 53) and must have been especially felt in temple complexes due to the sacred environment where graffiti were placed. What emerges is an important aspect of these memorial acts: in order for graffiti authors to fulfil their wish of being remembered, their texts needed to not be removed and to be read aloud. We can assume, therefore, that part of the religious

54 This is the full 22-letter Aramaic alphabet in traditional order. The only other secure alphabetic sequence from Hatra comes from House 1 (Moriggi 2019, 320).

experience in temples such as Temple III involved the active (and passive) repetition of the commemorations that already populated those spaces. This provides us with unique insights regarding the sensory dimension of local devotional practices.

One of the central questions in the study of ancient graffiti concerns the identity of their creators. More specifically, scholars often seek to determine whether these marks were made by unauthorised individuals—such as intruders or squatters—who lacked the formal right to inscribe or leave their mark in a given space.[55] Although this question carries an inherent bias, inherited from the history of graffiti scholarship, and raises complex issues surrounding authorisation in antiquity, the identification and contextualisation of graffiti creators—at Hatra as elsewhere—remains a crucial component of the research. The corpus of personal names in Hatran Aramaic has been recently comprehensively revised and updated by Enrico Marcato in 2018. Building his work on the volume by Sabri Abbadi (1983), Marcato prepared a catalogue of 376 names, including all the texts published until 2018 and in preparation at that time.[56] Although transcriptions can sometimes diverge significantly causing different readings of the names, the work by Marcato has been used as the main reference for the identification and attestation of personal names. Several possible links can be identified among the individuals mentioned in the texts. *ʿbdsmy'* son of *ʿbdšlm'* (H 15) could be the father of *ʾštṭ* (H 26); the same *ʿbdsmy'* could be the brother of *ʿwbd'ly* son of *ʿbdšlm'* 'the great priest' (*kmr' rb'*) and therefore the uncle of *nšryhb* son of *ʿwbd'ly* (H 25). Both *ʿbdsmy'* and *ʿwbd'ly* could be brothers of *ʿqyb'* the 'major-domo of Baalshamin' (*ʿqyb' rbyt' dy [bʿlšmy]n*), who is also son of an*ʿbdšlm'* (H 16a). Hence, the *ʿbdšlm'* mentioned in H 15 and 16a without a title could be the same *kmr' rb'* as in H 25. Additionally, *ʿqyb'*, who appears first in the list of names in H 1015, could potentially be the same individual as *ʿqyb'*, the major-domo (house steward) mentioned in H 16a. If this interpretation is correct, all these names belonged to members of the family of the great priest *ʿbdšlm'* (Figure 16). Notably, the inscriptions left by the members of this family seem to occupy prominent locations within the temple. The one exception is H 1015, whose exact original placement cannot be reconstructed. H 16a is inscribed on the highest part of the wall, H 25 and H 26 are the only two securely positioned on the north wall (i.e., isolated form the majority of the other texts on the norther portion of the east wall), and H 15 is located on one of the doorjambs at the entrance to the pronaos. What emerges most prominently, then, is the family of *ʿbdšlm'*, the 'great priest', who is mentioned three times. Although *ʿbdšlm'* himself is never the direct dedicator or dedicatee of any of the inscriptions, this is not unusual in Hatra. In fact, many high-profile figures—such as the *rbyt* (cf. Marcato 2015)—are often attested only once in the corpus, and not always directly. The limited number of mentions, therefore, does not necessarily reflect the family's

55 The authors of graffiti in Hatra's residential buildings have often been viewed as intruders, squatters, or as individuals who continued to inhabit the same structures in a state of decline or degradation (Venco Ricciardi 1998; 2004; Bertolino 2003). For a broader discussion of such preconceptions in studies on the ancient world, see Baird and Taylor 2011b.

56 Names in Moriggi and Bucci 2019 are therefore also listed in Marcato 2018 with the exception of those in H 1074, potentially all new entries, because the facsimile is not reliable. Remains outside this work *nbwbrk* attested in H 1125 and published in Moriggi 2019.

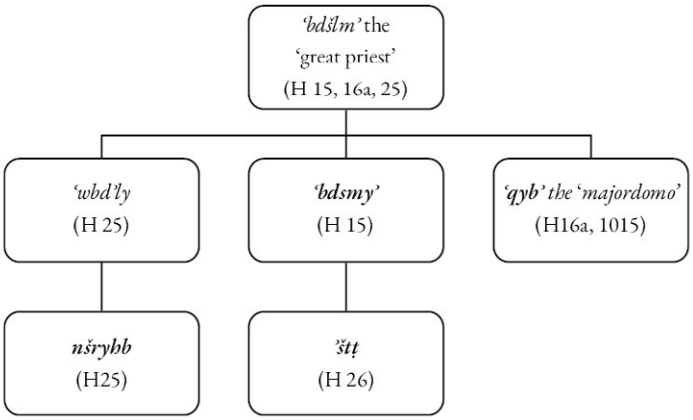

Figure 16 Hypothetical reconstruction of the family of *'bdšlm'*, the 'great priest', based on epigraphic evidence from Temple III.
Names in bold indicate the original dedicatees of the inscriptions.

visibility, prominence, or influence. A parallel but less extensive case of family relationships in the temple might be found in the *'qb* of H 19, who could plausibly be the father of *'qbn*, and the administrator mentioned in H 49.

In addition to *'qyb'* the 'major-domo of Baalshamin' in H 16a, *'qb* the 'comptroller/treasurer of the House of Baalshamin' (*ḫšbn' dbyt b'šmn*),[57] *br'y kmr'* 'priest' in H 27, and *š'dw kmr'* 'priest' in H 1038[58] were most likely other important officials in the temple. The location of H 27 on the left jamb of the naos is particularly meaningful and probably expresses the desire of this social group (all priests perhaps?) to highlight their prominent role in the temple. Furthermore, another individual comes from a family of priests: *'g'* son of the priest *'bdšm'* (H 51). While the precise functions and internal hierarchy of temple personnel remain difficult to determine, the available evidence points to a complex administrative system with multiple levels of responsibility. It is likely that each deity or cultic institution maintained its own cadre of officials and administrators. What this meant in terms of spatial access within the temple is harder to assess—especially given the building's relatively simple architectural layout. Nevertheless, based on the evidence examined, it is reasonable to conclude that such traces belonged to a sanctioned practice and that these individuals were permitted to commission or inscribe texts and pictorial graffiti directly onto the temple's architectural surfaces. The fact that in H 23 and H 1015 the gods are explicitly invoked to bring the inscribed messages into effect further reinforces their sanctioned character.

57 The word is a *hapax legomenon* in Hatran Aramaic. It is attested in both Palmyrene and Edessan Aramaic, but only in Hatra it seems to have been used to indicate the role of a comptroller/treasurer (Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995, 411).

58 The name *š'dw* is not read by Marcato 2018.

As for the family of *'bdšlm'*, it would not be unusual for multiple members of the same household to be involved in temple service. Comparable patterns are well attested in religious centres in other cities—for example, in Palmyra, where the priesthood was often a hereditary profession.[59]

The number of people commemorated in the temple also includes professionals other than those mentioned and pertaining to the religious administration. A large dipinto located immediately below H16a on the south arch of the vault remembers the architect (*'rdkl'*) *ḥbw/ys'*.[60] Like H 16a, this inscription (H 16b) occupies a highly prominent position on the south arch (Figure 13). Visitors entering the temple would have had to look upward to read it, an act that, while possibly requiring effort, would nonetheless draw attention to the names inscribed above them. The placement of H 16a–b thus contributes not only to the visibility of these figures but also to their symbolic dominance over the space and the activities unfolding beneath. Given the content and placement—commemorating both the temple's major-domo and an architect—it is plausible that H 16a–b was executed by a professional painter hand at the time of the temple's completion. A similar commemorative intent likely underlies H 17, located on the north arch, which honours *kbyrw* before Baalshamin and all the gods. Unfortunately, H 17 is heavily weathered, and both patronymic and title (if originally present) are no longer legible.

Another profession can be inferred—albeit indirectly—from two dipinti: *'bdy*, mentioned in H 24a–b, was likely either a painter or a scribe. Although no title accompanies his name, the fact that *'bdy* explicitly states that he is responsible for having written the texts strongly supports this identification. Additional evidence may lie in the material and visual characteristics of the texts: H 24a–e, along with H 23, 25, 26, and 27, are all rendered in black pigment—perhaps ink?—rather than the red paint used for larger inscriptions in the same building. These black inscriptions are also physically smaller, with each line typically no longer than 30 cm, suggesting the use of different tools and techniques and potentially pointing to a specialised role in their production. Our understanding of scribes and scribal traditions at Hatra remains limited. The Hatran Aramaic word for scribe *spr'* is attested at least five times (H 35:3; 215:1; 221:2; 289a:3; 408:9), all in religious contexts. This consistent pattern strongly implies a link between scribes and the religious or temple administration. In some cases, the title bears an explicitly cultic character—for instance, in H 35, where an individual is designated 'the scribe of Bar-Maren'. In the case of Temple III, then, we must imagine a scenario in which professional painters—and quite possibly scribes—were actively commissioned to produce inscriptions, whether formal commemorative texts or more ephemeral graffiti.

Incised and painted marks were placed on the same walls, without any relevant overlapping (apparently), nor any significant distinction. This further emerges when considering that temple officials and their relatives could leave both painted as well as incised inscriptions asking for remembrance or recording economic transactions. Therefore, what we

59 Kaizer 2002, 234–42; Raja 2019; Kubiak-Schneider 2023.

60 See Aggoula 1988 and Kubiak-Schneider in this volume on attestations of architects, masons and sculptors in Hatra.

observe in Temple III are different degrees of 'officiality' and agency: the major-domo, the architect and certain *kbyrw* have beautifully painted texts on the highest part of the wall (H16, 17), possibly made at the completion of the temple or of its last phase. H 25, painted in black, reproduces the shape of a small wooden board and it is a bit more isolated on the north wall but still close to the north-east corner (Figure 14). The painted frame imitates the form of portable writing boards that likely circulated in Hatra,[61] and this choice appears to be deliberate. The inscription commemorates a descendant of the great priest *'bdšlm'*, suggesting an effort to highlight noble lineage. The framed format could serve a dual function—enhancing the visual authority and monumentality of the text, similar to the *tabulae ansatae* found in graffiti at the Palmyrene Gate at Dura-Europos,[62] and possibly alluding to the profession of the individual commemorated. If he was an administrator or official, this frame might have been a reference to the tools he used in his work. The cluster H 24a–e, also painted in black, consists of short, interconnected inscriptions. Though less formally arranged, they collectively commemorate at least two individuals and include references to the author—likely the painter or scribe *'bdy* (H 24a–b)—and a third person (H 24c). Finally, H 14, the largest inscription in the temple, consists of an alphabetic sequence. Its scale and visibility suggest an apotropaic role, in line with the protective use of alphabets elsewhere in the ancient world. However, this remains speculative, especially given that only one other example of such a sequence is known from Hatra.[63]

Additional insights emerge from the archaeological and epigraphic evidence in Temple III. Individuals appear to be attested, commemorated, or to have dedicated objects only once within the temple, with a few possible exceptions. One such case is *'qyb'*, the 'major-domo,' who may be identified in both H 16a and H 1015, and there seems to be attestations of members of the same family, especially that of *'bdšlm'* (see *supra*). Within this family, more than one individual per generation could be commemorated, sometimes simultaneously (Figure 16). This pattern suggests that dedications and commemorations were typically one-time acts in a person's interaction with the temple. This informs us about the temporality of these acts, although we cannot determine with certainty the occasions that prompted them—whether specific festivals, religious banquets, or other ceremonial events.[64] The case of *'bdšlm'* is telling: his name appears three times, but only within the patronymics of his descendants—never as an active dedicant or recipient. This may indicate that he was already deceased by the time the temple was completed and the inscriptions were produced. While the precise circumstances surrounding the creation of these texts remain unclear, it is plausible that the large, painted inscriptions on the vault were created to mark the completion of the temple or of a renovation (see *supra*). As for the other inscriptions, it is reasonable to suppose that some were made or commissioned

61 Cf. the wooden plaque from the Palmyrene Gate at Dura Europos, Baur and Rostovtzeff 1931, 148–51.

62 Baird 2018.

63 Moriggi 2019, 320.

64 Cf. texts from the Temple of Assor and Serū in Arsacid Assur (Marcato 2020).

to accompany a donation, or to reflect a shift in the social or religious status of the author or dedicant—though this is highly speculative.

Finally, the dense clustering of texts on the north-east corner—mostly on the northern part of the east wall—is particularly intriguing. It indicates a zone of focused activity, which is not otherwise highlighted by other installations or artefacts. This concentration may stem from two dynamics, possibly complementary: first, a simple additive tendency, where new inscriptions were placed in proximity to older ones—following a well-documented "me too" phenomenon in ancient writing practices;[65] second, the possibility that this corner provided a suitable vantage point for observing rituals and ceremonies within the space. Interestingly, this area appears relatively empty in terms of cult installations, especially compared to the north-west corner, the areas in front of the naos, and south-east and south-west areas (Figure 9). Although archival photographs show that the plaster on the south part of the east wall, the south wall, and the west wall was slightly less well preserved, the surviving large portions of wall plaster did not bear recognisable graffiti, making the existing clusters topographically significant. This spatial contrast raises the question of whether an intentional division of ritual or social functions existed. If so, the north-east corner may have served as a space for lingering, interaction, and increased sociability.

Conclusions

Due to the extensive range of evidence within the temple and the lack of temporal references (both dates and months, with the exception of H 49), it is challenging to pinpoint specific moments when individuals would have accessed the temple and produced these texts. The occurrence of sacred meals and reunions, for example, certainly presents one possibility. However, what the epigraphic evidence in Temple III helps us understand is the nature of the commemorative, devotional, and administrative practices taking place within the shrine, how these practices were physically manifested, and who was responsible for them. The temple also presents a unique case of a large cluster of graffiti on walls when compared to other smaller temples, where graffiti either appear on objects (e.g., Temple I, Temple VI, Temple XIII) or are found on the floor (e.g., Temple XII). The individuals identified in these texts are not the same as those mentioned in other dedications within the temple (H 20–22), suggesting that people were marking their presence and expressing their devotion in different ways. Epigraphic evidence indicates that Temple III was predominantly frequented by priests and their families, especially that of *'bdšlm'*, thus combining a bond based on professional association with one rooted in kinship. Curiously, however, no visual representations of priests or temple personnel were found within the temple, signalling a discrepancy between textual and iconographic modes of communication. While it has been proposed that the temple was mainly used by pilgrims and visitors to Hatra who were not permitted access to the Great Temenos, a reassessment

65 See Bucci 2023 for further discussion and references, particularly in relation to the definition proposed by Michael C. A. Macdonald.

of the archaeological and epigraphic data offers a more nuanced perspective. Although this interpretation remains possible, especially given the presence of the statue of the foreign King *'tlw*, the material points convincingly to a strong involvement of local communities and temple officials. Future research would benefit from applying similarly detailed analyses to other temples in Hatra and comparing the results—especially with sites like Dura-Europos, where comparable practices of writing and interaction with the built environment are evident across several sanctuaries. It would also be valuable to undertake comparative studies of temple personnel and institutional organisation at Palmyra and Dura, where documentation provides rich parallels for understanding the administrative and religious roles within urban sanctuaries.

Appendix: Textual Evidence from Temple III[66]

H 14

Transliteration:	*'b g d h w z ḥ ṭ y k l m n s ʿ p ṣ q r š t*
Location:	Pronaos, northern portion of the east wall
Technique & material:	Incised on wall plaster
Dimensions:	L. 140 cm
Editions:	Safar 1951, 178; Caquot 1952, 97; Vattioni 1981, 29; Aggoula 1991, 13; Vattioni 1994, 42; Beyer 1998, 31.

H 15

Transliteration & translation:	*dkyr 'bdsmy' br 'bdšlm'* May be remembered *'bdsmy'* son of *'bdšlm'*.
Location:	Entrance to the temple, north doorjamb
Technique & material:	Engraved on limestone
Dimensions:	L. 45 cm
Editions:	Safar 1951, 178–9; Caquot 1952, 97; Vattioni 1981, 29; Aggoula 1991, 13–4; Vattioni 1994, 42; Beyer 1998, 31.

H 16

Transliteration & translation:	a - *dkrnyn ṭbyn l'qyb' rbyt' dy [b'lšmy]n br 'bdšlm' qdm b['lš]myn mlk'*

66 Readings are based primarily on Beyer 1998. Divergent readings by other scholars have been taken into account, and where the text is particularly fragmentary, I have avoided adopting reconstructions that are not supported by multiple editors unless justified by a reliable photograph or drawing. The English translation is my own. Personal names have been checked against Marcato 2018 and are not vocalised. Legenda: [.] = one letter missing; [..] = two letters missing; [...] = three or more letters missing; [x] = reconstructed reading; (x) = uncertain reading; <x> = omission in original text; (...) = meaningless sequence.

Good remembrance for *ʿqyb'* the major-domo of Baalshamin son of *ʿbdšlm'* in front of Baalshamin the king.
b - *dkrnyn ṭbyn lḥbwš' 'rdkl' br ʿwbdw br ʿnny qdm bʿlsmyn mlk'*
Good remembrance for *ḥbwš'* the architect son of *ʿwbdw* son of *ʿnny* in front of Baalshamin the king.

Location: Pronaos, south arch of the vault
Technique & material: Painted in red on wall plaster
Dimensions: L. 110 cm
Editions: Safar 1951, 179; Caquot 1952, 97–8; Vattioni 1981, 29–30; Aggoula 1991, 14; Vattioni 1994, 42; Beyer 1998, 31–2.

H 17
Transliteration & translation: *[dk]rnyn ṭbyn lkbyrw [qdm] bʿ[lš]myn mlk' w'lh' k[lhwn]*
Good remembrance for kbyrw in front of Baalshamin the king and all the gods.

Location: Pronaos, north arch of the vault
Technique & material: Painted in red on wall plaster
Dimensions: L. 110 cm ca. (heavily damaged)
Editions: Safar 1951, 179; Caquot 1952, 98; Vattioni 1981, 30; Aggoula 1991, 14–5; Vattioni 1994, 42; Beyer 1998, 32.

H 18 Pronaos, northern portion of the east wall
Transliteration & translation: *(šl' ʿšmtt) / šlm' 'štṭ br šbʿ ṣ⟨y⟩r'* (?)
...Peace upon *'štṭ* son of *šbʿ* the painter (?).
The first line was probably aborted by the scribe because *m* is missing and the letters are executed poorly (see Beyer 1998, 32).

Location: East wall of the pronaos, to the right of the temple entrance
Technique & material: Painted in red on wall plaster
Dimensions: L. 55 cm
Editions: Safar 1951, 180; Caquot 1952, 99; Vattioni 1981, 30; Aggoula 1991, 15–6; Vattioni 1994, 42; Beyer 1998, 32.

H 19
Transliteration & translation: *dkyr ʿqb*
May be remembered *ʿqb*.

Location: Pronaos, on a block found on the floor
Technique & material: Engraved on a stone block
Dimensions: 30 cm
Editions: Safar 1951, 180; Caquot 1952, 99; Vattioni 1981, 30; Aggoula 1991, 16; Vattioni 1994, 42; Beyer 1998, 32.

H 20

Transliteration & translation: *ṣlm' d'bdsmy' br wrdn / br šly 'qym lnpšh 'l / ḥyyhy ddh wd'ḥyhy / wdmn drḥym lh klh / dkyr lṭb*
Statue that *'bdsmy'*, son of *wrdn* son of *šly*, erected for himself, for his life, and for that of his brothers and of all who love him. May he be remembered for good.

Location: Pronaos, northern portion of the east wall, on the base of a statue of a nobleman and on the supporting bracket

Technique & material: Carved into limestone

Dimensions: L. 50 cm

Editions: Safar 1951, 180–1; Caquot 1952, 99–100; Vattioni 1981, 30–1; Aggoula 1991, 16–7; Vattioni 1994, 42; Beyer 1998, 32.

H 21

Transliteration & translation: *ṣlm' dy 'tlw mlk' ntwn'šry' [...] / plḥ 'lh' bryk 'lh' dy [...]*
Statue of *'tlw* king *ntwn'šry'*..., worshipper of the gods, blessed by the gods...

Location: Pronaos, southern portion of the west wall, on the base of the statue of king *'tlw*

Technique & material: Carved into limestone

Dimensions: L. 57 cm

Editions: Safar 1951, 181; Caquot 1952, 100–1; Vattioni 1981, 31; Aggoula 1991, 17; Vattioni 1994, 42–3; Beyer 1998, 33; Pennacchietti 2019, 146–47.

H 22

Transliteration & translation: *qrb 'bd[...] [br] lšgl' [d]k[yr] l[ṭb]*
'bd[...] son of *lšgl'* has offered. May he be remembered for good.

Location: Pronaos (?), on cylindrical incense container

Technique & material: Incised on marble

Dimensions: - (object dim. 16.3 x 9.5 cm)

Editions: Safar 1951, 181; Caquot 1952, 101; Vattioni 1981, 31; Aggoula 1991, 17–8; Vattioni 1994, 43; Beyer 1998, 33.

H 23

Transliteration & translation: *dkyr wbryk qdm b'šmyn 'lh' wqdm 'lh' klhwn / nšr'qb brmrk' dy brmryn wgdyhb lṭb wlšnpyr / wmn dy lšḥqh lṭb b'šmyn qnh wzr'h mn q⟨d⟩myhy / wbgn šḥrw 'l ymth dy mn dy lqryhy wl' / ldkrhy lnšr'qb lṭb wlšnpyr*
May be remembered and blessed in front of Baalshamin the god and all the gods *nšr'qb* official (*brmrk'*?) of Bar-

Maren and *gdyhb* for good and in a beautiful way. And whoever would damage it, may Baalshamin destroy his goods and his offspring before him. And curse of Shahiru upon anyone who reads this and does not remember *nšrʿqb* for good and in a beautiful way.

Location: Pronaos, east wall
Technique & material: Painted in black on wall plaster
Dimensions: L. 35 cm
Editions: Safar 1951, 182; Caquot 1952, 102–3; Vattioni 1981, 32; Aggoula 1991, 18–20; Vattioni 1994, 43; Beyer 1998, 33–4.

H 24

Transliteration & translation:

a - *bl dkyr brzqyq' qdm mrn wbʿšmn rʾwʾb' lṭb 'n' 'bdy ktbyt*
d - *mn dy lmr dy dkryn lṭb*
e - *dkyr lbyš mn dy lšʾḥqʾ wlqr [h]n[w]*
b - *bl dkyr šmʿny lṭb 'n' 'bdy ktbyt*
c - *bl dkyr t[...] lṭb*

a - Truly may be remembered *brzqyq'* in front of Maren and Baalshamin the great for good. I, *'bdy*, wrote.
d - Whoever will say the commemoration, may he be remembered for good.
e - Bad remembrance for whoever erases or reads these (without saying the commemoration).
b - Truly may be remembered *šmʿny* for good. I, *'bdy*, wrote.
c - Truly may *t*[...] be remembered for good.
The numbering follows Beyer 1998, but the order of presentation reflects the actual sequence from top to bottom in the apograph.

Location: Pronaos, east wall near the north-east corner of the room
Technique & material: Painted in black on wall plaster
Dimensions: L. 50 cm
Editions: Safar 1951, 182–3; Caquot 1952, 103–4; Vattioni 1981, 32–3; Aggoula 1991, 20–1; Vattioni 1994, 43; Beyer 1998, 34.

H 25

Transliteration & translation:

dkyr wbryk nšryhb br 'wbd'ly br 'bdšlm' kmr' rb' qdm / mrn wmrtn wbrmryn wbʿsmyn 'lh' rb' lṭb [w]lšnpyr hw [w]mn dy / rḥym lh lṭb wlšnpyr

May be remembered *nšryhb* son of *'wbd'ly* son of *'bdšlm'* the great priest in front of Maren, Marten, Bar-Maren,

and Baalshamin the great gods for good and in a beautiful way, and all who love him for good and in a beautiful way.
Location: Pronaos, north wall at ca. 100 cm from the north-east corner of the room
Technique & material: Painted in black on wall plaster
Dimensions: L. 27 cm
Editions: Safar 1951, 183; Caquot 1952, 104; Vattioni 1981, 33; Aggoula 1991, 21; Vattioni 1994, 43; Beyer 1998, 34–5.

H 26
Transliteration & translation: *dkyr ʾštṭ br ʿbdsmyʾ / [qdm] mrn wmrtn wbrmryn ʾlhʾ / rbʾ lṭb wlšnpyr*
May be remembered *ʾštṭ* son of *ʿbdsmyʾ* in front of Maren, Marten, and Bar-Maren, the great gods for good and in a beautiful way.
Location: Pronaos, central portion of the north wall
Technique & material: Painted in black on wall plaster
Dimensions: L. 15 cm
Editions: Safar 1951, 184; Caquot 1952, 104–5; Vattioni 1981, 33; Aggoula 1991, 21–2; Vattioni 1994, 43–4; Beyer 1998, 35.

H 27
Transliteration & translation: *nšr[y] / [...]yʾ / br ʿbdšʾ / ʿqbšmʾ / brʿy / kmrʾ / ʿbdgdʾ*
nšr[y], [...]yʾ son of *ʿbdšʾ*, *ʿqbšmʾ*, *brʿy* the priest, *ʿbdgdʾ*
Location: Entrance to the naos, north (right) doorjamb
Technique & material: Painted in black on wall plaster
Dimensions: L. 6–15 cm ca.
Editions: Safar 1951, 184; Caquot 1952, 105; Vattioni 1981, 33–4; Aggoula 1991, 22; Vattioni 1994, 44; Beyer 1998, 35.

H 48
Transliteration & translation: *bl dkyr [...] / dkyr ʿgʾ br ḥyrw ʾrykʾ lṭb qdm mr[n] lṭb*
Truly may be remembered... May be remembered *ʿg*ʾ son of *ḥyrw ʾryk*ʾ (the tall one) for good, in front of Maren for good.
Location: Pronaos, northern portion of the east wall (close to the entrance)
Technique & material: Incised on wall plaster
Dimensions: L. 90 cm
Editions: Safar 1953, 244; Caquot 1955, 53; Vattioni 1981, 40–1; Aggoula 1991, 38; Vattioni 1994, 46; Beyer 1998, 41.

H 49

Transliteration & translation:	*bywm 9 ngḥ' 8 / btšry [...] l'/ [ḥ]šbyt 'm 'qbn br 'qb ḥšbn' dbyt b'šmn dmyn tšr[y...] / 'l štt' bṭbt wslq l[...]'[.]nyn wḥṣ' [...]* On the 9th day, in the evening of the 8th of Tišrī, I settled the accounts with *'qbn* son of *'qb*, the accountant of the House of Baalshamin, for the prices of Tišrī(?)..., the 6th of Ṭ̲ēṯ and it totalled to units...and the surface...
Location:	Pronaos, northern portion of the east wall, located above H 50
Technique & material:	Incised on wall plaster
Dimensions:	L. l.1 27 cm (overall L. 90 cm ca.)
Editions:	Safar 1953, 244–5; Caquot 1955, 54; Vattioni 1981, 41; Aggoula 1991, 38–9; Vattioni 1994, 46; Beyer 1998, 41.

H 50

Transliteration & translation:	*dkyr 'bd'dn l[...] / rhbl' lṭb wlšpyr qdm '[.]' / qdm mrn wm rtn wbrmryn [w] '[.]' dmškn'* May be remembered '*bd'dn... rhbl*' for good and in a beautiful way in front of ..., in front of Maren, Marten, and Bar-Maren... of the holy dwelling.
Location:	Pronaos, northern portion of the east wall, located below H 49
Technique & material:	Incised on wall plaster
Dimensions:	L. 26 cm
Editions:	Safar 1953, 245; Caquot 1955, 54–5; Vattioni 1981, 41–2; Aggoula 1991, 39–40; Vattioni 1994, 46; Beyer 1998, 41–2.

H 51

Transliteration & translation:	*bl dkyr 'g' br 'bdšm' kmr' kmr' [...]* Truly may be remembered '*g*' son of *'bdšm'* the priest...
Location:	Entrance to the temple, south doorjamb
Technique & material:	Engraved on limestone
Dimensions:	L. 42 cm
Editions:	Safar 1953, 245–6; Caquot 1955, 55; Vattioni 1981, 42; Aggoula 1991, 41; Vattioni 1994, 46; Beyer 1998, 42.

H 52

Transliteration & translation:	*dkyr nšryhb br ḥyr' / [br] wylt ⟨br⟩ blg' / [l]ṭb wlšnpyr qdm / mrn wmrtn wbrmryn 'lt / wsmyt' klḥyn hw wmn dy rḥym lh*

May be remembered *nšryhb* son of *ḫyr'*, son of *wylt* son of *blg'*, for good and in a beautiful way in front of Maren, Marten, and Bar-Maren, Allat and all the standards. He and all who love him.

Location: Pronaos, east wall, at 75 cm above the floor
Technique & material: Incised on wall plaster
Dimensions: L. 33 cm
Editions: Safar 1953, 246–7; Caquot 1955, 55–6; Vattioni 1981, 42; Aggoula 1991, 41–2; Vattioni 1994, 46; Beyer 1998, 42.

H 291

Transliteration & translation: *brbʿlšmyn br / šmšʿqb ʿbd*
brbʿlšmyn son of *šmšʿqb* made (the bronze mask).
Location: East façade of the temple, south portion (niche/open-air shrine), on copper-alloy Medusa mask
Technique & material: Engraved on metal sculpture
Dimensions: - (object dim. 13 x 13.5 cm)
Editions: Safar 1971, 12–3; Vattioni 1981, 94; Aggoula 1991, 142; Vattioni 1994, 66; Beyer 1998, 84.

H 1015

Transliteration & translation: *ʿq[y]bʾ / mršqn (lh rbš) / wrš[y] /* (...) / (...) */ (lh) bšynʾ* (...) / *wbgn mrn ʿl mn dy lq[rhy] / lhdn ktbʾ wlʾ / ldkwr*
ʿq[y]bʾ, *mršqn* (?)..., and *ršy* (?), ... And curse of Maren upon anyone who reads this inscription and does not remember (say the commemoration).
Location: Pronaos (?), to the right of a graffito depicting a goddess in Greek clothing
Technique & material: Incised on wall plaster
Dimensions: -
Editions: Aggoula 1991, 179–80 (no. 21); Vattioni 1994, 90 (no. 013); Beyer 1998, 108.

H 1038

Transliteration & translation: *šʿdw kmrʾ*
šʿdw the priest.
Location: Pronaos (?)
Technique & material: Incised on wall plaster (?)
Dimensions: -
Editions: Beyer 1998, 112.

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The Missing Ritual Potters of the Ancient Near East? An Ethnoarchaeological Approach

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1 Introduction

While terracotta objects have been recovered from a wide range of ritual deposits and cultic contexts across the ancient Near East, their producers remain enigmatic. Unlike other types of specialists commissioned for temple activity, potters and coroplasts are rarely mentioned in Near Eastern textual records. In fact, the most important evidence of their art are the objects themselves and ritual tablets that describe artifacts during ritual implementation. Furthermore, the role of craftspeople is often absent or masked in ritual tablets, which even go so far as to credit ritual agents, like the Neo-Assyrian *āšipu*, with tasks that might otherwise be associated with craft producers.

The difficulties compound when we search for the production lines responsible for clay ritual implements that are part of temple furniture, like cult stands and shrine boxes, not to mention utilitarian pottery. While archaeologists may use stylistic trends or provenience studies to speculate about the organization of production and production networks, this is a far cry from reconstructing the place of artisan communities in the temple economy or social life. Nor are the makers of these objects likely to have left any indication of their identity on their work or produced texts describing their production processes.

For these reasons, we must cast further afield to construct potential scenarios that might explain how terracotta artisan communities gained and curated ritual knowledge, their relationship with ritual specialists, and how their services were commissioned. To that end, this paper uses ethnographic studies of crafts specialists, ancient Near Eastern ritual tablets, and artifact analysis from exemplar cultic sites in the southern Levant to posit several hypotheses that might shed light on the role terracotta specialists played in ritual communities.

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2 Potters in the Near East

Evidence from other studies of Near Eastern clay object producers seems to indicate that a variety of clay objects were produced by potters.[1] Unfortunately, potters, unlike other craftspeople, are largely absent from Mesopotamian texts.[2] Many of the texts represent correspondence between state officials and craftspeople or records of food rations and materials given to the craftspeople. The relative absence of potters in these texts suggests that potters procured their own raw materials, working semi-independently from the state.[3] Even in the Ur III period, when potters are better represented in the texts, the potters only worked for the state part-time, controlled resource procurement and distribution, and could hire themselves out for wages.[4]

Furthermore, there is little evidence that ceramics were considered prestige items for either royal house or temple. Rather, fine textiles, metals, and precious and semi-precious stones appear to have been highly valued and their procurement and production closely controlled.[5] Even these elite sponsored crafts became decentralized in the first millennium.[6] This chronological shift also appears to have occurred in Egypt. Although some evidence may connect female figurine production with state or temple complexes in Late Bronze Age Egypt, evidence for this connection in the Third Intermediate and Late Periods is lacking.[7] Even in the New Kingdom, evidence shedding light on the potting industry is scarce,[8] and the texts seem to suggest potters were given less esteem than other craftspeople.[9]

In light of this fact, we might also ask to what extent being a potter was an important aspect of group identity. Postgate refers to at least one potting community that seemed to live in a separate village, near Nineveh.[10] The locus of daily production, or at least firing activities, often seems to have occurred in spatially designated areas, on the outskirts of settlements. Specialized knowledge of the landscape for clay harvesting is often required. Potting was a family business, passed from parent to child and spread through relational, long-term apprenticeships.[11] Potters may also have been organized in guild-like commu-

1 Darby 2014 with sources; Steinkeller 1996, 243; Moorey 1994, 141, 162, 163.
2 Duistermaat 2008, 347, 420, 421; Steinkeller 1996, 233–34; Moorey 1994, 141.
3 Duistermaat 2008, 347, 420, 421; Steinkeller 1996, 250; Heltzer 1996, 279; ibid. 1987, 243; ibid. 1979, 475, 488, 493, 495.
4 Steinkeller 1996, 247, 249; Stein and Blackman 1993, 49; Moorey 1994, 17; Postgate 1987, 259.
5 Stein and Blackman 1996, 50–55; van de Mieroop 1987.
6 Moorey 1994, 14; Postgate 1987, 268; Oded 1979, 100; Groß 2018, 379.
7 Waraksa 2009, 47, 88–89. See also Meskell 2004, 105, who argues that there were some overlap in roles between Egyptian temple priests and sculptors though this may apply primarily to sculptors, rather than potters. Sculptors seem to have a different status than potters across ancient Near Eastern artisan communities (on this point in Ugaritic literature, see Helzer 1987, 243).
8 Frood 2003, 37.
9 Eyre 1987, 173, 193.
10 Postgate 1987, 268.
11 Duistermaat 2008, 346–47; Steinkeller 1996, 240–4; Sallaberger 1996, 37–38.

nities under a chief potter.[12] It seems plausible to suggest that potting extended beyond a mere occupation but overlapped with other salient identity categories, like residential community and kinship bonds, and this constellation might undergird potting communities' collective and individual identities.

3 Ritual Pottery Production by Text

Identifying the ritual production processes likely assigned to potters remains difficult. In Sallaberger's study of Mesopotamian potters, the majority of texts describing potters working with or for temples (which is itself a small number) refer to the production of vessels for feasting and consumption. Overall, the attestations are few. One potter working in the Ur III Inanna temple was described as working in the Iskurs clay pit, presumably to aid in clay harvesting.[13] Potters are listed as having made three different vessels associated with the "malt-eating festival of Ningirsu."[14] One dedicatory text describes the "chief potter of Ninurta" dedicating a vessel to the deity.[15] Potters are listed among affiliates of major houses (many of which were associated with temples) and were likely producing vessels for food production, storage and distribution, making them more akin to professionals in food production than to craftsmen.[16] Sallaberger does identify a few vessel terms that could have a more specific ritual function like ^{dug}siškur$_2$(-ra) (vessel for rites) and the bur-zi vessel (see also and ^{dug}bur-zi gal) used exclusively in cultic activity, possibly a libation bowl. In sum, the vessels are predominantly associated with eating and drinking during rituals (e.g., beer) or their actual function remains unclear.[17]

Although Sallaberger also mentions a small number of ritual texts describing the production of figural images (*ṣalmu*) among his treatment of potters,[18] the majority of these texts actually preserve production directions for the *āšipu* rather than the potter.[19] One ritual in particular, *šep lemūttī ina bet ameli parasū*, or "to block the entry of the enemy into someone's house," describes in some detail clay harvesting, painting figurines, and stationing figurines around the home for a multi-day exorcistic and apotropaic ritual.[20] In the relevant sections of the ritual, the text describes the *āšipu* retrieving clay, which is then taken to the city, presumbly where the figurines are formed and fired. According to the

12 Groß 2018, 380.
13 Sallaberger 1996, 13.
14 Ibid., 27.
15 Ibid., 29.
16 Ibid., 21, 33, 35.
17 Ibid., 62, 69, 70, 77.
18 E.g., ibid., 8–9.
19 Darby 2014, 61–97.
20 Wiggermann 1992.

text, they are then painted by the *āšipu*.[21] Figurines with forms similar to those described in the ritual have been found throughout Neo-Assyrian sites.[22]

As in most Neo-Assyrian figurine ritual texts, the role of the potters is completely masked. While we cannot rule out the possibility that ritual specialists harvested their own clay and/or painted their own figurines, evidence from excavated specimens makes that highly unlikely.[23] A ritual specialist would need to know the location of appropriate clay beds (information that is often highly guarded by potters) and access to pigmentation with which to create the paint for the images. In contrast, archaeologists typically assume that paint was applied by the producers of images or related crafts people.[24] It seems likely that the ritual tablets are masking the fact that someone other than the ritual specialist accomplished these tasks by using narrative to reinsert the ritual specialist back in the generative process.

4 What Can We Learn from Texts about Rituals and Ritual Texts?

One of the primary challenges presented by the ritual texts is that they are not records of artisan work or generated by artisans themselves. They are the result of scholarly scribal activity, generating and curating tablets. This does not necessarily mean that they preserve nothing of the production process, but the condition of their creation suggests we proceed with caution when investigating what the texts might suggest about actual artisan activities. Another challenge is that the majority of ritual tablets that mention production processes are not discussing clay images, and where clay images are described, they are not referring to clay implements created as part of shrine assemblages.

4.1 Intentional Omission

Whether in Esarhaddon's "Renewal of the Gods,"[25] where artisans are described as being deaf and blind, or in biblical polemics against images (e.g., Isa 44, Jer 10) where those making "idols" are portrayed as ridiculous and ineffective, literature describing the construction and activation of cultic objects seems to intentionally mask the role of the artisan or erase the artisan entirely. In texts describing the mending of cult images, we learn little about the process other than the fact that ritual singers accompany the image to the workshop and continue until the image repair begins.[26] In the *mīs pî* ritual, the entire two-day cycle begins only after the image has been largely completed. In other words, we learn nothing of the production process or what rituals may have taken place before *mīs*

21 Ibid., 14–15; For the location of production in the city, see Text I:44, 88, 168–69.
22 Woolley 1926, Ellis 1968, 164; Green 1983, Nakamura 2004, 2005; cf. Van Buren 1931, 46.
23 Darby forthcoming.
24 Darby 2014, 307–309, Waraksa 2009, 54, 58, McCormick 2023, forthcoming.
25 Walker and Dick 2001, 38; Evans 2012, 111–12, 125.
26 Farber 2003; Hurowitz 2003, 155–56.

pî starts.[27] At best, the allusion to the gods of the craftsmen (who the artisans ritually attribute with actually making the image)[28] may hint that particular deities associated with specific types of crafts may have been involved in rites performed during production. The incantations also describe the purity of the craftsmens' tools,[29] though it would be difficult to know whether this is only a ritual recreation meant to highlight the divine origin of the image or an allusion to an actual practice of tool purification craftsmen undertook in the actual production process.

In *šep lemūttī*, while the text describes clay harvesting and painting, it does not ascribe to the ritual specialist any steps of the production process, like levigating the clay, molding the figurine, drying the specimens, loading the kiln, or firing the kiln. These are completely omitted from the ritual narrative. Only their absence is represented in the text (e.g., whatever happens between clay harvesting and painting), leaving archaeologists to infer production steps and artisan activities based on the excavated figurines matching the text's description. That informtion suggests that not only did the exorcists not produce the image, but it is unlikely they were present for clay harvesting or even painting.[30]

Returning to the *mīs pî and pīt pî* ritual texts, even while the roles of the artisans are intentionally erased as part of the ritual, the tablets preserve evidence of a power-sharing agreement, since the cult image could not be made without either the *āšipu* or the *ummânu* (in this case, a carpenter).[31] The question remains – given the unique identity of ancient potters, often in contrast with other craftspeople like sculptors, does the same collaboration characterize the creation of clay shrine furniture and ritual implements? In particular, if Berlejung is correct to argue that the statue of a deity is already a god both before and after the *mīs pî*,[32] then perhaps shrine furniture, with or without anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms, falls into a separate category entirely. The same question might be raised about Berlejung's reflections on the role of divine craftsmen guiding human artisans or even oracular interventions communicating divine directives in the design of a cult image[33] – would the same apply to other objects commissioned for temple use?

4.2 Purity Rituals

In one area some evidence may suggest overlap between the creation of the cult image and other creative acts. Berlejung argues that at the beginning of the *mīs pî* the various offerings brought before the image, like wood, reed, salt, herbs, semi-precious stones, precious

27 Walker and Dick 2001. For additional examples of texts describing divine image dedication, construction, and repair that mask artisan roles while focusing on the dedicatory role of kings and divine guidance over make and manufacture given through divination and cultic officials, see Hurowitz 2012.

28 Berlejung 1997, 62.

29 Ibid., 54, 62.

30 Darby forthcoming

31 Borrelli and Escobar 2022, 33.

32 Berlejung 1997, 52, 60, 61–62, 70; ibid., 2021, 7–10.

33 Berlejung 2021, 7–8.

metals, oils, ghee and treacle actually functioned as purifying agents.[34] She makes the same case for the purification of the holy water in the Babylonian recension, in this case describing precious metals, wood, stones, soapwort, reed, homed alkali, treacle, ghee, oil and incense.[35] In fact, many of these items are also present during clay purification and figurine installation in several figurine rituals among the Hand of Ghost texts[36] and at various stages throughout the *šep lemūttī* acquisition and painting of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines.[37]

Furthermore, Borrelli and Escobar liken the *mīs pî* to Neo-Assyrian descriptions of glass-making, noting the similarities between choosing an auspicious day to begin *mīs pî* or to lay kiln foundations for glass manufacture.[38] Other steps of glass-making include setting up images to purification deities, sacrifices, funerary offerings,[39] burning censers before the kiln is lit, and preventing anyone impure from approaching the kiln while it is burning.[40] In *šep lemūttī* purification rituals to Kusu and Nigirim take place after all the figurines are constructed and painted but before they are stationed in the house.[41] When taken together, it seems plausible that purification rituals were necessary for most types of cultic objects, leaving open the question of whether this would be undertaken by the artisans or the ritual specialists and whether this might occur during the actual production or only during implementation.

4.3 Divine Raw Materials

Another area of comparison is the ritual attribution of divine origin to either finished objects or their raw materials. In the creation of bricks for temple construction, the rituals focus on the origin of the materials and the beginning of the process. For example, van Buylaere, Watanabe, and Altaweel note that in the texts describing Gudea's work on the Eninnu temple, extispacy had to be used to identify the appropriate clay source for the first brick of the construction project. Even the clay used for bricks themselves had to undergo either real purification or at least an idealized form through ritual incantation.[42] These descriptions could suggest some collaboration between artisan and ritual specialist was necessary, whether at the outset (which might be confirmed by foundation deposit rituals) or after-the-fact.

Descriptions of colored-glass production also display an interest in the origins of the glass-making process, with specific types of wood that are to be cut for the kiln during the

34 Berlejung 1997, 52.
35 Ibid., 58–59.
36 Scurlock 2006, 206–7, 210, 258, 314, 346, 519, 534, 544.
37 Wiggermann 1992, 9, 13, 17, 18.
38 Borrelli and Escobar 2022, 36.
39 Ibid., 37.
40 Ibid., 38.
41 Wiggermann 1992, 17.
42 van Buylaere, Watanabe, and Altaweel 1999, 185.

month of Abu,[43] purifying the wood before burning begins. The texts also focus on the origin and types of stones used.[44] Borrelli and Escobar liken this process to the Seleucid era texts describing the creation of the *lilissu* drum, in which the bull is given divine origin at the beginning of the ritual, much the way the *mīs pî* ascribes divine origin to the cult image,[45] and even the wood itself[46] (although this occurs ritually after the manufacture is complete as opposed to before manufacture begins). Figurine ritual texts, like *šep lemūttī*, some Hand of Ghost texts, and several NAM.BÚR.BI rituals, include a standard purification of the clay pit that ritualizes the clay pit as that of Anu, Enlil, and Ea, providing a divine origin for the raw material used to make figurines.[47] Regardless of when this ritualization occurred in the production process, the focus on the selection of raw materials and their connections to the divine realm may have permeated the knowledge fields of both the artisans and the ritual specialists.

4.4 Who Produced What and Where?

One interesting point of departure between figurine rituals and the *lilissu* drum ritual may confirm the hypothesis that potters operated at a greater distance from the temple system. In contrast with the absence of technical descriptions concerning the make and manufacture of the actual figurines in *šep lemūttī*, the descriptions of the *lilissu* drum go into great detail at every stage of the production process, displaying a fairly intimate knowledge of the process of leather manufacture.[48] It is possible that the curators of the ritual texts had a closer relationship with the temple musicians making the drums than earlier cultic officials shared with the potters who likely produced the fired figurines required for figurine rituals. This difference may suggest that while the musicians and cultic personnel shared access to a temple workshop, the potters may have had little overlap with ritual officials during the pottery production process. Furthermore, drum-making required the ritual slaughter of a bull, which may have necessitated closer collaboration with ritual specialists.

This is born out by literature alluding to the location where different objects were produced. The *mīs pî* texts seem to imply that the relevant workshop (*bīt mummi*) was located along with the river bank and the orchard in a large enclosed territory only accessible to temple personnel, and in this case, the relevant craftspeople.[49] In Esarhaddon's account of renovating the Babylonian temples, craftsmen from the workshop singled out through divination by Šamaš and Adad had to first enter a "secret place" where access was closely guarded.[50] The text is clear that these *ummânus* do not include potters, though potters

43 Borrelli and Escobar 2022, 46.
44 Ibid., 45–47.
45 Ibid., 61.
46 Berlejung 1997, 54.
47 Darby 2014, 78, 85, 89.
48 Borrelli and Escobar 2022, 62–65.
49 Berlejung 1997, 50.
50 Groß 2018, 371.

are occasionally included under that title, for example in letters describing monumental building projects in the establishment of Dur Šarrukin by Sargon II.[51] Other texts refer to a *bīt mummi* associated with and near the temple, particularly for the various craftsmen needed for the manufacture and repair of statues related to gods and kings,[52] but also for the construction of musical instruments like the *lilissu* drum.[53] No text has yet to provide evidence or even to imply that potters were part of these temple workshops.[54]

4.5 Summary: What to Do about Potters?

In sum, one of the larger challenges using the ritual tablets to reconstruct the production process of clay objects in shrines is that the ritual tablets are either describing the production of other types of artifacts (e.g., cult images, instruments, etc.) or the production of clay figurines for use outside the temple. They do not refer to the production of shrine furniture (e.g., cult stands, shrine boxes, altars). None of the terms in either the ritual tablets or Sallaberger's study easily correlate to clay ritual implements generated for permanent use in shrine space.[55]

The paucity of the evidence leaves open the question of whether ceramics specialists, like some other artisans, required special access or purification spaces for production of shrine furniture or iconographic objects when creating ritual deposits for temples. In other words, the role of the potter in cultic activity largely overlaps with the role potters played in creating utilitarian vessels for daily life. The texts are not detailed, but they do not contain any indication that the production process for a vessel used in a temple ritual varied from normal conventions or that the production of temple vessels needed to take place in a special location or under particular circumstances. Nevertheless, the logic behind the ritual implementation of objects used in service of the gods indicates that at least purity if not other types of ritual manipulation would have been necessary for such objects to be used in shrine spaces, particularly in light of the fact that some Levantine traditions, like those preserved in Leviticus and Numbers, indicate that clay could be particularly susceptible to the transmission of purity and impurity.[56]

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51 Ibid., 372.

52 Farber 2003; Hurowitz 2003, 155–56.

53 Borrelli and Escobar 2022, 55–58.

54 In the archaeological record, we have only minimal evidence for workspaces adjacent to temples, even in Mesopotamia. For example, Evans 2012, 127–35 suggests that the Level VII Nintu Temple may have incorporated an area for sculptors to create and repair Earl Dynastic statues. Bär 2003, 68–69 notes that in Building Stage E of the Ishtar Temple, a series of rooms southwest of the temple contained kilns, though their relationship to the temple remained unclear. In the same area, another kiln was assigned to the courtyard of Buildin GF (ibid., 63) and in Building H (ibid., 45).

55 On this point, see also Braun-Holzinger 1991, 2–3, 11, who strongly argues that the rich ceramic inventory from ED-OB Mesopotamian temples stands apart from votive practice, though she allows the possibility that the increasing number of terracotta plaques toward the end of the Neo-Sumerian period might have stood in lieu of more costly votive materials.

56 Darby 2014, 277–83.

Figure 1: Location of Cultic Deposits at Yavneh, Ḥorvat Qitmit, ʻEn Ḥaẓeva.

5 Clay Patterns and Ritual Construction: The Levant

In the case of the Levant, patterns in clay type might indicate that even "utilitarian pottery" made for use in shrines along with specialized cultic furniture might require unique production contexts. Studies of cultic items and regular pottery from Levantine sites such as Ḥorvat Qitmit, ʻEn Ḥaẓeva, and Yavneh, each showed that both pottery items and cultic items in the deposits were made predominantly from the same local clay, a pattern that differs from the creation of domestic figurines and pottery in settlements like Jerusalem, which included a range of clay recipes and levigation methods (Fig. 1).

These three sites, ranging from the ninth to the sixth centuries B.C.E., were all subjected to various forms of provenience testing. All three deposits are described as favissae or at least having resulted from specialized ritual discard by the excavators. In the case of Yavneh, excavation did not uncover any adjacent cult site. Furthermore, there is some question about whether the remains reflect votive gifts[57] or cultic furniture.[58] The de-

57 As per Kletter 2010a, 186–88; Panitz-Cohen 2010, 112.

58 Note, Panitz-Cohen 2010, 212–13 is aware that the largely wheel-made pottery at the site displays a fairly standardized and narrow range of make and manufacture. She contrasts this with the hand-formed boxes, which she considered votive offerings made on a more ad hoc basis. At least, she thinks the boxes and pottery came from different production lines. She is not certain whether the pottery reflects a commissioned line or whether it was generated from individuals purchasing items on their own from regular pottery producers. She acknowledges that if the pottery was originally individually acquired items left to hold votive offerings in a temple, the purchasers seem to have a very proscribed idea of what types of vessels are appropriate. In contrast, there are other indicators that might suggest that the pottery and the boxes were made by similar hands. In addition to the similar results of petrographic analysis (Ben-Shlomo and Gorzalczany 2010, 156) for example,

posit itself had been disturbed by a bulldozer and looting prior to excavation, and while the excavators noted four depositional layers, they interpret the deposit as a single phase.[59] None of the shrine boxes produced any evidence of burning during use,[60] nor were they intentionally crushed or broken,[61] though some of the pottery did include traces of burning and may have been intentionally smashed.[62]

At Ḥorvat Qitmit, in the Negev, the remains of badly damaged architecture were present in two main areas of the site. At least one of these areas, called Complex A, was likely the location of cultic activity (though the original excavator claimed both Complex A and B were cultic). The finds themselves were badly damaged and scattered rather than interred all together, as the cultic remains were at Yavne and ʻEn Ḥaẓeva. Instead, artifacts were spread over a wide area, including down the eastern slope of the site, with some fragments purportedly found over 100 m. away. Artifacts were more plentiful near Complex A,[63] including in a "shallow pit" on the eastern slope that the excavator interprets as a favissa.[64] The fragments of remains were so badly damaged that only ca. 25 % of the remains could be identified.[65]

ʻEn Ḥaẓeva, in the southern Negev, differs from Ḥorvat Qitmit in a few respects. The majority of the cultic finds, also damaged, were found in one designated area. It was not a "pit" per se, but the finds were crushed under shaped stone blocks that seemed to be intentionally placed over the remains.[66] Furthermore, unlike Ḥorvat Qitmit, which has no adjacent settlement, the favissa deposit at ʻEn Ḥaẓeva was located immediately outside of the casemate walls of a large Iron Age fortress.[67] The Yavneh deposit likely dates to the ninth through eight centuries BCE, while the Ḥorvat Qitmit and ʻEn Ḥaẓeva remains date to the seventh through sixth centuries.

The clay object assemblages differ to varying degrees. Yavneh consists primarily of what is variously called cult stands, shrine boxes, or model shrines (Fig. 2). There are few known Iron Age Levantine comparanda for the rectinlinear shape of the Yavneh cult ob-

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both the boxes and the chalices are covered with white slip, occasionally preserving remains of paint (Panitz-Cohen 2010, 114). This might suggest either the entire deposit consisted of votives acquired by different visitors but from the same production line or it leaves open the possibility that the items were cultic furniture commissioned by the cultic officials. Elsewhere, she notes that the mode of production for both the boxes and the chalices seems to have been similarly dictated by a central authority, though she maintains they must have been made in different workshops (Panitz-Cohen 2015, 114).

59 Kletter 2010b, 54–57.

60 Kletter 2010c, 40.

61 Kletter 2010b, 53.

62 Panitz-Cohen 2010, 112.

63 Beit-Arieh 1995a, 3, 8.

64 Beit-Arieh 1995b, 26. Note that this feature is missing from the main plan in Fig. 1.6, though appears to be represented by a scatter of finds in Fig. 2.6, though without any actual indication of a pit cut or other structural features. In the photograph of Fig. 2.17 no clear pit cut or shape is visible.

65 Beck 1995, 27.

66 Ben Arieh 2011, 108–111.

67 Cohen and Yisrael 1995, 1996.

Figure 2: Above, Shrine Objects from Ḥorvat Qitmit; Right, Shrine Objects from ʻEn Ḥaẓeva; Below, Shrine box from Yavneh.

jects. The rectilinear boxes incorporate anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and plant imagery, as well as architectural elements, like columns.[68] The site also produced one clay altar and one model shrine and a narrow range of pottery types, predominantly bowls and chalices but also fire pans, a kernos, zoomorphic vessels, and a few examples of round fenestrated stands.[69]

The Ḥorvat Qitmit and ʻEn Ḥaẓeva assemblages are more similar, though distinct as well. Both produced anthropomorphic stands, comparable with examples from central Jordan at Wadi ath-Thamad[70] and Tell Damiya (Fig. 2).[71] The Qimit assemblage produced more evidence for cylindrical decorated stands, including both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic imagery,[72] while the ʻEn Ḥaẓeva favissa stands included only two examples of attached anthropomorphic forms and minimal evidence for zoomorphic attachments.[73]

68 Ziffer 2010.
69 Zwickel 2010, Panitz-Cohen 2010, Kletter and Ziffer 2015, Kletter 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, Panitz-Cohen 2015.
70 Daviau and Steinter 2017.
71 Petit and Kafafi 2016.
72 Beck 1995.
73 Ben-Arieh 2011, 121–27.

The stands at ʻEn Ḥaẓeva tend toward fenestrations, incised decoration, and denticulation. All three sites lacked freestanding figurines almost completely. In addition to the cultic remains at Ḥorvat Qitmit, the pottery at the site included a wide range of forms, including bowls, chalices, kraters, basins, cooking pots, jars, jugs, juglets, and cups.[74] Pottery from the extramural shrine at ʻEn Ḥaẓeva include high footed denticulated bowls, goblets/chalices, tripod cups, and bowls.[75]

Despite these differences, each of these three Iron Age II deposits demonstrated a remarkable homogeneity in clay recipe across what might be called "cultic" forms (e.g., shrine stands, attached anthropomorphic and zoomorphic decorative elements, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels, model shrines, chalices, tripod cups) and more utilitarian vessel forms that may have been incorporated in cultic ritual (e.g., bowls, cups, jugs).[76] This pattern contrasts with the results of provenience studies of cultic items and utilitarian pottery in domestic settings. At least in Jerusalem, where the largest such study has been completed, the dominant clay used for tested samples from domestic ritual objects was never used to create Jerusalem pottery.[77] The samples spanned the entire Iron Age IIb-c and came from different buildings and areas of the City of David. In contrast, the shrine refuse contexts seem to have been generated by a single period of use, reflect varying levels of ritualized deposition, and were deposited alone or adjacent to non-domestic architectural remains.

The relative homogeneity of clay recipes for shrine deposits could suggest that the cultic furniture was largely created at one time or by one designated production line. It is likely the production line was responsible for both cultic equipment and other pottery vessels used in cultic activity. For example, at Yavneh pottery was constructed using clays normally considered ill-suited for daily-use pottery.[78] The consistency in clay recipe at each site could also reflect concerns with ritual purity, hinting at specialized production processes for the shrine equipment.

6 Production Rituals in Ethnographic Studies

If patterns in provenience and archaeology of Levantine shrines suggest the possibility that specialized production could have governed the creation of terracotta shrine furniture and vessels, the question remains what types of ritual activities we might be looking for. Since these objects are almost entirely absent in the textual corpora, ethnographic comparanda may suggest possibilities for further analysis. Moreover, the ancient texts that describe ritual object production are not produced by craft communities. In con-

74 Freud and Beit-Arieh 1995.
75 Ben-Arieh 2011, 145–58.
76 Ben-Shlomo and Gorzalczany 2010, 157; Ben-Shlomo 2015; Cohen-Weinberger 2011, Gunneweg and Mommsen 1995, 280–86; Gunneweg et al., 1991, 239–53.
77 Darby 2014, 183–212; Ben-Shlomo and Darby 2014; Ben-Shlomo 2025.
78 Ben-Shlomo and Gorzalczany 2010, 156.

trast, ethnographic studies allow researchers to observe the crafting process and discuss production steps and related rituals with the artisans themselves.

6.1 Clay Choice

Ethnographic studies indicate that ceramicists often have ritual motivations for production steps, including the choice of clay for ritual objects.[79] At the same time, studies also suggest that when making ritual forms, especially if they do not undergo extensive handling, potters may not use their most complex techniques, particularly in levigating and firing.[80] This suggests that observed patterns in clay recipe may be the result of regular clay harvesting and levigating recipes for a given production line, or patterns may reflect special decisions in clay choice related to the function of the objects, either because the objects are used less frequently than utilitarian vessels or because of ritual requirements. While the studies document various workflows for clay harvesting, it is normally kept within the same family or potting community. In no case, whether ritual objects or utilitarian vessels, was the clay harvested by a ritual specialist.[81]

6.2 Ritual and Iconography: Cultic Personnel and Artisan Communities

To what extent do we think ancient artisans of cultic objects gathered and curated the ritual knowledge necessary to produce the cult objects? Artisans procure their knowledge of symbols in a variety of ways. For example, in one ethnographic study of Yoruba carvers across modern day Nigeria, Togo, and Benin, cult personnel could sponsor apprenticeships for wood carvers who made masks, figures, and other sculpture. In exchange the carvers would make ritual masks for ritual use.[82] In this model, carvers are commissioned by cultic personnel as need and ritual calendar dictates, and cultic personnel can help support the exchange of ritual knowledge for apprentice carvers.

In other studies, as with some Anang carvers, carvers also played roles as ritual specialists themselves.[83] Anang carvers working in the southeast region of Nigeria also had a titular guardian spirit, and before a carver begins their career (after one year of apprenticeship) a shrine to the spirit must be constructed in a carver's house. Anang carvers also

79 Darby 2014, 194–95; Taniguchi 2003, 146; Salem 1999, 69–73; Sterner 1992, 171–79; Huyler 1994, 325; Hardin 1996, 40; Blurton 1997, 171; Lefferts and Cort 1999, 25; Bowser 2000; Norman 2000, 69–70. This may include motivations like tradition and group cohesion as well, even for utilitarian forms, e.g., Day 2004, 131–32.

80 Vaughan 1973, 183.

81 London 1989, 75. If the potters are female, male members of the family may retrieve the clay (London 1991, 183). Alternatively, at the potting village of Deir el-Gharbi, in Upper Egypt, clay is mined by a separate class of mining specialists who provide potters with clay. In this case, the clay is procured by someone entirely unconnected to the potter's family (Nicholson and Patterson 1985, 224–25).

82 Bascom 1973, 64, 74.

83 Messenger 1973, 103, 116.

claimed direct guidance for their designs from the guardian spirit, whom they supplicate at the beginning of the carving process.[84] Thus, the ritualization of production is built upon unique knowledge shared among carvers, and these ritualizations are an integral aspect of both entry into the profession and the successful construction of the objects.

In ethnographic study of Gola carvers along the border of Sierra Leone and Liberia, the carvers' inspiration included dreams or spiritual guidance as the source of their knowledge, rather than just knowledge gained through apprenticeship.[85] While the Gola carvers in this study were not considered cultic officials, they did share a relationship with the secret religious associations. Carvers produced headpieces and masks for these associations and had special access to the cultic knowledge they needed to create the objects. Even the commissioning of the ritual objects was highly ritualized within the religious societies.[86] The carvers retained ownership of cultic items until all agreed upon obligations were complete and the secret association had given the item a "new name" at which point ownership was transferred to the association.

Moving to India, in the case of Bengali image makers from the Kumbhakar caste who make molded clay deities for religious festivals, production lines may highlight the antiquity of the molds they use for production. Preserving the mold is not meant to diminish respect for artisan knowledge but to ensure the customer of the artisan's expertise and the appropriateness of the image. Iconographic knowledge is measured by perceived replicability and preservation of accepted iconographic forms and dimensions.[87] Artisans curate their own molds and production processes, while attendees and religious officials serve primarily to commission production.

In cases where molds are not relevant, like the Nathdvara painters producing images of Shri Nathji in Rajasthan, India, it is likely that originally the painters came under management of the temple authorities, making sure that the miniature paintings of the deity match the proportions of the main cultic image in the *haveli* temple.[88] At least originally, faithfulness to certain aspects of the temple images was integral to the painting, requiring the painters and temple authorities to collaborate.

Bengali image-makers also shed some light on the question of painting images. The image is activated when the deity's eyes are painted by the artisan. In older accounts, a painter, separate from the potter, painted the model at an auspicious time.[89] Nevertheless, the image still has to be formally installed in the temple by Hindu priests, who enliven the image through an elaborate ceremony, which largely overlooks the role of the artisan.[90]

It is also common that the ritual steps preserved by artisans might not match perfectly with known textuall records. In some cases, the antiquity of the tradition remains import-

84 Ibid., 105–108.
85 d'Azevedo 1973, 323.
86 Ibid., 1973, 324–26.
87 Heierstad 2017; Sen 2016; cf. Nardi 2009.
88 Nardi 2009, 108
89 Ghosha 1871, 3, 13–14.
90 Heierstad 2017.

ant for the artisans, even if specific implementations differ from the textual tradition. For example, Parker discusses the differences between south Indian temple-building practice (based on ethnographic study) and a range of texts under the category *Shilpashastras*. This literature proscribes in detail the requirements for auspicious temple building and image construction. In Parker's study, the *shastras* were invoked differently by bureaucrats and by master architects and sculptors. Artisans claimed the authority invested in the *shastras* but without adhering in practice to every detail of their specifications.[91] Similarly, Nardi's comparative study between the textual tradition and image painters suggested that scholars should approach the concept of *shastra* as both transmitted canonical texts and a living practical/visual and oral/verbal process of transmission by artists themselves.[92]

In most of these examples, the artisans collaborate to varying extents with ritual officials. Only rarely is an artisan also considered a ritual official, suggesting these roles are frequently independent. Moreover, ritual officials generally need the assistance of artisan groups, particularly when objects require specific craft-based expertise. The balance of power in this process varies, however. In some cases, the artisans need the support of ritual officials to access the symbolic knowledge and then need permission to deploy those symbols for particular ritual ends. In other cases, the artisans rely upon their own ritual processes and symbolic knowledge based on experience from past creations and even dreams or visions to generate the necessary cultic objects. The role of the artisan is often masked when the ritual objects are enlivened as part of the ritualization. Where ancient texts are preserved and known, sometimes artisans claim the authority invested in the literature while simultaneously improvising to meet unique production requirements and solve particular challenges. This may bring artisans into tension with ritual officials but generally the relationships remain collaborative.

6.3 Locus of Production

Artisans are often able to produce ritual objects even in their own homes;[93] however at times an artisan could be required to travel to a specialized location. Returning to the Anang, when carving masks, figurines, and puppets for a drama association, a carver will live in the compound of the group commissioning the images while he produces the items.[94]

Before the twentieth century, Bengalese image-makers would travel to Kumartuli (the potters quarter) in Kolkotta seasonally to make unfired clay images for the Durga Puja.[95] This was necessitated due to proximity to the festivals in the city rather than ritual requirements that images be produced there. Eventually itinerant image-makers moved to Kumartuli and established a more permanent presence.

91 Parker 2003.
92 Nardi 2009
93 e.g., Bascom 1973.
94 Messenger 1973, 117.
95 Heirstad 2016, 244–45.

Traditionally, these artisans made images for household pujas in a variety of locations.[96] Older accounts record the importance of place and location in the production process, as different parts of the image were made in different locations. For example, a bamboo slit at the center of the images was brought before the household *murti* for ritualization and kept there for several days. It is then taken away to begin constructing the framework that supports the image, though this seems to have taken place outside of the potters' residence. Only the heads of the images were prepared at the potter's house.[97] The entire process of construction included rituals throughout, such as purifying the bamboo before *murti*, prayers, waiting for an auspicious moment to build the support framework, and incorporating a variety of ritual materials inside the images (e.g. cow dung, rice husks, and specific soils).[98]

Thus, artisans of ritual objects may construct them in various locations. Production location could relate to ritual calendar and even practical matters, like the difficulty moving completed images to a temple or for a ritual society. The locus of production could be dictated by ritual need as well, such as the need to purify and dedicate the space for the production of items and ritual requirements that items be made in particular areas. Collaboration with other artisans also impacts this process, as when a clay image is painted by someone other than the image maker.

6.4 Technological Requirements

One of the main challenges in these comparative cases is that most of the items described above do not require access to more dangerous production processes, like kiln-firing or smelting. A carver can travel relatively easily to a remote location, so long as they have a method to procure the necessary raw materials. In the case of Bengali potters, while the size of some clay *kumartali* images would make them difficult to transport, they do not require the space and technology associated with firing.

When the objects are kiln-fired (as is certainly the case with the ceramic shrine furniture and pottery associated with the Levantine shrines described above), would necessary access to kilns make it more likely that a production line would need to construct a new production center adjacent to a shrine? Or would the benefits of proximity to extant kilns make it more likely that the objects would be produced in established workshops? And would the burden of transporting harvested clay and clay levigation materials to a remote location make travel less likely? Or would the potters maintain knowledge of raw materials within range of the temporary production site? If transport and construction were too difficult, would unique ritualizations need to occur at the site of a standard workshop when creating shrine furniture and vessels used in shrine ritual? Or would a purification process have taken place by ritual specialists after production was complete?

96 Ghosha 1871.

97 Ibid., 2–3.

98 Cf. with ritual materials from the Kasyapasilpa, Slaczka 2007, 54, 82, 106, 112, 124, 126, 140, 174, 182, 264.

The demands of building temporary kilns might mitigate against the likelihood that production lines created temporary workshops at the shrine site. In their study of pottery making in Egypt, Nicholson and Patterson found that kilns at Deir el-Gharbi were demolished, re-sited, and rebuilt, but on the timeline of every five to ten years.[99] In London's recently published study of Cypriote village potters, she found that kilns used to make both ritual objects, like censers, as well as utilitarian vessels were primarily located adjacent to village houses,[100] though she also describes itinerant potters, including the process for creating a short-term kiln/pit.[101]

Day notes that one of the challenges itinerant potters could face is finding appropriate clay beds and encountering uneven clay quality; but in his study of potters from Crete, those issues were less problematic due to the repetition of geological formations across the island, as well as standardization in potters' clay recipes.[102] It may be important, however, that the itineracies mentioned in Day's study are seasonal rather than one-time production events. This means villages connected along the circuit already had established areas on their outskirts to build (or reuse) kilns and produce the vessels. Itinerant potters also curated knowledge of raw material sources along these routes.

7 Summary and Conclusions

These ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological studies enable several preliminary conclusions. While artisans are not always omitted during ritualization, omission or erasure is a fairly consistent feature of ritual installation across multiple different geographic and cultural settings. This may suggest that in the ancient Near East the omission of the artisans' role in the ritual texts represents more than the wishes or perspectives of the ritual specialists but an important step in ritual efficacy. The studies also suggest that, despite ritual separation of objects from the artisan, most rituals require collaboration between artisans and ritual experts. These relationships take varying forms. In some settings ritual specialists exert a high degree of control over the creation of ritual objects, while in others, artisans draw upon their own ritual relationships with their respective deities and maintain their own ritual knowledge that informs production process and iconographic content. In situations where the knowledge of ritual specialists comes into some conflict with the enacted procedures used by the artisan, artisans may still invoke the authority invested in a scared textual or visual tradition even while making adjustments during implementation.

Deities and/or spirits are invoked during the production process by artisans in various traditions, and purity during production process can be a driving factor, not just for rit-

99 Nicholson and Patterson 1985, 231–32.

100 London 2024, 7.

101 London 2016, 47–48; 2020, 69–71, 164, 169–70, 173; London 2025, 19. See also Day 2004, 113, 118, 199–20, 128–29.

102 Day 2004, 120, 129.

ual specialists but for the artisans themselves. Whether or not artisan rituals match those of ritual specialists or, where relevant, a received textual tradition, it seems reasonable to conclude that the production process for cultic artifacts is ritualized. Even the production process for utilitarian objects can be ritualized, particularly if it involves more dangerous processes, like firing.[103] In the studies above, rituals propitiating guardian deities/spirits and/or intended to purify the workshop, tools, and materials occur at varying times in the production processes, including both the beginning of the creation and after the object is complete. The former rituals are most frequently performed by the artisans, while the latter are often under the purview of ritual specialists.

The locus of production varies considerably, with some artisans producing cultic objects in their own workshops and others traveling to the locations where rituals will take place. Some artisans produce the entire artifact in remote locations, while others only move the object after production is complete. Even when carried out in an artisan's home workshop, the production ritual may require that different production steps be completed in different locations of the compound or in different houses.

Unfortunately, none of the ethnographic studies included here examined artisans attached to local shrines or temples, so they cannot shed light on the degree to which being employed primarily by a religious institution might impact the location of artisan work. At least, in these examples contiguity with the location of religious ritual was rarely a requirement for the objects to be found efficacious. The technical requirements for kiln-firing and clay bed harvesting would likely present serious impediments to creating entirely new, temporary workshop sites for terracotta cultic objects, though this cannot be ruled out. Like the Crete examples, the soil formations revealed through the petrography of cultic assemblages in the southern Levant are broad enough that more than one local clay bed might bear the same petrographic signature,[104] mitigating, somewhat, possible challenges in clay harvesting and levigating associated with mobile, temporary workshops.

For the time being, the combined information from ethnographic study of artisans producing cultic items seems to support the hypothesis that artisans, not just ritual experts, were involved in ritual steps during the production of cultic objects. Regardless of the perceived cost or value of the material from which an object is made or the social status ascribed to the artisan role or community, ritual requirements seem to demand the participation, at various stages, of both artisans and ritual specialists. While the ancient textual record disproportionately preserves the perspective of ritual specialists, it must remain at least possible that, where the texts describe rituals related to raw materials or production, these passages may reflect some measure of actual artisan practice, whether artisans engaged in rituals similar to those ascribed to ritual specialists or they implemented unique rituals but for similar ends (e.g., purity).

103 See London in this volume as well as London 2024, 42, 107.

104 For example, the Ḥaẓeva formation that constituted the majority of tested samples from the ʿḤorvat Qitmit and ʿEn Ḥaẓeva assemblages, spans the entire northern Aravah and eastern Negev; Iserlis and Thereani 2011, 185.

In the instances where the texts are silent about artisan production rituals, it is possible that other data derived from the objects themselves might hint at the specialized procedures for the creation of clay cultic items. Unique iconographic content, manufacturing technique, and petrography indicate that the, at least in the case of the Levantine shrine deposits discussed here, it is likely that potters were commissioned by ritual officials, that they curated their own ritual knowledge that informed production process and symbolic content, and that they had to collaborate with ritual officials in the transferal of objects to the shrines and their activation. How specific artisans were selected for commissioning (e.g., divination, reputation, availability, contiguity, prior relationship) remains unclear as do the locations of production, though production at extant workshops seems most likely.

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The suppliers of traditional clay incense burners made in Cyprus for ritual use at home and at church

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The question of who creates and supplies ritual artifacts in traditional societies can be addressed through ethnoarchaeological research in Cyprus. Objects fashioned by hand from wax and clay in recent times continue to play a role in ritual practices in cities and villages. Votive offerings fashioned from wax in the shapes of babies and humans, or their livers, hearts, arms, legs, and more, hang in churches to appeal for improved health or in appreciation for healing. The craftspeople who shaped the votives that are sold in shops also made candles for use in church. In private homes and churches, clay incense burners (censers) remain in use although they have largely been replaced by glass, silver, or imported ceramic versions. Women pass a smoking censer in front of household members to ward off potential evil or harm, for example prior to a long voyage or when a funeral procession passes by the house. Censers also stand in cemeteries on graves sites.

The Cypriot traditional potters who worked with local red clays have been the focus of ethnoarchaeological research since 1986 by G. London who has observed and recorded their work while living full-time in two pottery-producing villages, Agios Demetrios and Kornos. The potters used wood-burning kilns to fire their heavy, thick-walled wares which were destined almost exclusively for local customers rather than tourists. In contrast are the ceramic incense burners, glazed plates, jugs, jars, decorative pieces, salt and pepper shakers that are thrown on a fast wheel, fired in modern electric kilns, and destined for sale to locals and visitors. The producers of wheel-made pottery work in or near urban centers and in village settings.

The findings suggests that the craftspeople and suppliers of artifacts used in sacred spaces worked in a variety of venues and lacked any association to religious institutions other than, at times, physical proximity. The implication for archaeologists is that secular craftspeople furnished the ceramics required for ritual practices for the past century and possibly in antiquity.

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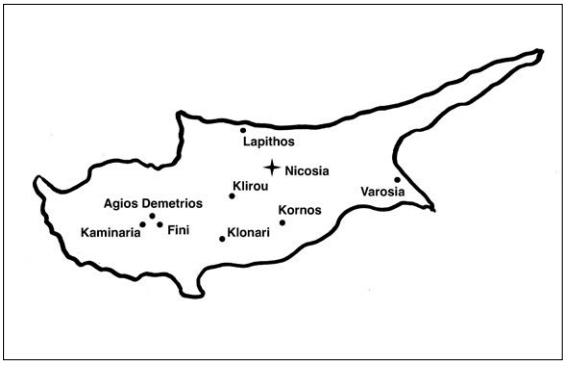

Figure 1. Map of rural pottery-production locations in Cyprus.

The setting

The small island of Cyprus (fig. 1) has been home to two contemporaneous practices of handmade pottery made from local red clays. The two techniques of manufacture involve coil-building, but subtle differences have prevailed, at least from the late 19th to the late 20th centuries, for pots made in the Lowland and the Troodos Mountain practices (London 2016, 26–31; 2024b, 147–55). At the same time, two practices of wheel-thrown traditional wares made from lighter colored clays included the Lapithos and Varosia (or Famagusta) practices. Pottery made in the Lapithos tradition tends to be glazed (Papanikola-Bakirtzis 2012) unlike the plain or occasionally painted white-wares from Varosia (Papademetriou 2005). In contrast, the handmade red wares lack paint and glaze but rely on decorative treatments that were incised, rouletted, impressed, stamped, or applied.

The long-term research among potters who work with red clay was initiated given the resemblance of their products to ancient pottery in terms of shape, manufacture, firing, and surface finish. The Lowland practice included the communities of Kornos, Klirou, and, until the mid-20th century, villages in the Troodos eastern foothills, such as Klonari. The second practice was confined to the uppermost altitudes of the Marathasa region in the Troodos Mountain range at three villages: Fini, Agios Demetrios, and Kaminaria. Potters of both practices shaped jugs, cookware, beehives, jars, ovens, decorative pieces, and incense burners.

In former times, each potter who used red clays worked at home during the dry season from April/May until October/November (London 2024a). A change occurred at one village in 1953 with the formation of the Kornos Pottery Cooperative. It offered a designated workplace and a communal kiln for use by members. The Cooperative procured the raw clay, bought the finished products, and then sold them to individual customers or to the owners of plant nurseries and shops. Most Kornos potters joined the Cooperative. Others preferred to continue working in their private courtyards at home. In 1986,

eight women were active at the Cooperative workspace while one member, who joined the organization nevertheless worked at her home. By 2024, two potters worked at the Cooperative and one private potter established her own studio. In 1986 there were two such independent potters. The village with the largest number of potters has always been Kornos since the 18th century according to written documentation (London 2016, 36–45).

Potters of the Troodos Mountain practice worked at home, in a shed, or in their courtyard and never organized into a larger organization. They sometimes would fire their wares together after shaping the pots at home. The last traditional kiln firing at Agios Demetrios occurred in 2002 and any pottery made since then was fired elsewhere in a modern kiln.

The total number of traditional potters who built pots from the red clays has dwindled from roughly 20 in 1986 to barely a handful by 2024. A decline in the need and utility of pottery resulted from the availability of modern equipment, including incense burners, either locally made or imported. Nevertheless, a small number of potters carry on the tradition of shaping pots by hand. Cypriots use the incense burners at church and at home as of this writing. A modest demand for handmade flowerpots, ovens, and cookware continues to support the industry.

The information presented here is based on observing the potters at work spanning the entire pottery-making season and on quantitative data collected on rates of production, firing loss, and pot sizes, including censers produced in the Lowland and Troodos Mountain practices. Additional information about the manufacture of small objects at Fini relies on an oral history volunteered by Eleni Platt (Christoforou) in July 2024.

Manufacturing technique for incense burners: Lowland and Troodos Mountain practices

Potters would sit all day on a low chair or a box while they shaped pots on a mobile turntable that rotated easily with the push of a finger, the side of the foot, or by exerting pressure directly on the clay. The turntable lacked momentum unless it had the weight of a heavy pot under construction. Incense burners were the smallest shape in the traditional repertoire and could be fashioned in one or two minutes on the turntable. Afterwards, each was set aside to dry. At the appropriate time while still malleable, the potter added a handle and trimmed the base while holding the piece in her hand. Plain, indented, gently scalloped, or fluted rims might have small added dabs of clay that were incised or not.

The most common censers stood less than 11 cm tall with rim diameters measuring not more than 11.5 cm (fig. 2). From the widest diameter at the rim, the body tapered down to a flat base between six to nine cm wide.

The fancier ovoid censers (fig. 3:1) with cutouts and applied decorative elements required considerably more work, patience, and skill to create. At Kornos in 1986, two independent potters produced ovoid censers, as did the lone Coop member who worked at home. She also made cookware, jugs, juglets, plaques, and small or large decorative

Fig. 2. Sooty and darkened Fini incense burners with decorated rims and handles on display at an exhibit held at the Cyprus American Archaeological Institute at Nicosia in 1995 (courtesy of S. Swiny).

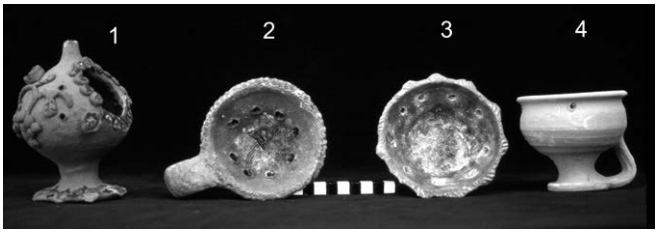

Fig. 3. Ovoid censer from Fini (1), conical bodies (2, 3 missing a handle) from Fini, plus a wheel-thrown version (4) from an urban pottery as displayed at the Cyprus American Archaeological Institute at Nicosia in 1995 (courtesy of S. Swiny).

and composite vases. To assemble the highly decorated pieces with their extra surface embellishments required sufficient space to shape the numerous components and allow them to dry slowly before attaching them to a pot (see fig. 6 for juglets with birds attached above handles and on the body). It proved easier to create a safe, protected space at home rather than at the larger workshop setting shared by six or seven potters, to allow each of the many parts to dry slowly prior to assembly. Previously another highly skilled Coop member had worked at home while caring for her ailing husband. With his passing, she returned to work at the communal workspace.

Types of incense burners and surface treatment

Incense burners made by hand normally can be assigned to the Lowland or the Troodos Mountain practices based on their shapes and surface treatments. A third category of wheel-

Fig. 4. Squat censer made at Klonari in the middle 20th century (courtesy of S. Swiny, 1995).

Fig. 5. Kornos round body with a gently scalloped rim standing on a pedestal above a small circular base.

thrown ceramic censers copies the common shape of handmade versions yet differs significantly given their thin walls of uniform thickness, small handle well below the rim, and the absence of incised and applied embellishments, or religious symbols (for example, fig. 3:4).

Lowland and Troodos Mountain censer shapes

The Lowland practice offered a wider variety of handmade censers than in the Troodos based on observations from 1986 to 2024 and surviving artifacts preserved in the Agios Demetrios Heritage Pottery Collection. Villagers at Agios Demetrios (Marathasa) donated 125 pots (London and Dometios 2015) including four incense burners made by previous generations of potters (London 2024b, 236–75). The collection provides an indication of pots produced over the past century when pottery first started in the village in 1891 after a young girl learned the craft from her relatives at Fini.

When the ethnoarchaeological fieldwork began, female potters in Kornos regularly made three types of censers as part of their traditional repertoire. The small squat forms with a handle from rim to just above the base (fig. 4) feel heavy. In comparison are the small, more delicate hemispherical bowls standing on a pedestal above a circular base (fig. 5). A small loop handle extends from rim to body. The third type of censer is the more complex and less frequently made closed ovoid form (similar to fig. 3:1 and see fig. 6 at Kornos).

Incense burners from the three Troodos Mountain communities had conical deep bodies thinning down to a thick pedestal and ovoid shaped base (fig. 2). Their long loop handle stretching from rim to base caused the latter to grow larger unlike the smaller circular bases of Lowland censers (fig. 5). Fini potters also produced closed ovoid censers (fig. 3:1).

Another difference in censers originating in the two practices concerns the rims. The rims of squat examples from the Lowlands might have three or more bits of added clay (London 2000, fig. 8.8). Figure 4 shows a wavy rim with added clay on a Klonari censer made some 70 years ago. In contrast Troodos censer rims from all three villages always have clay in the form of points or bumps which often were incised with slashes or crosses

(fig. 3:2,3). Troodos potters decorated the rims, handles, and bases with incised and/or three-dimensional crosses representing a symbol of religious significance. A snake-like incised pattern meandered down many handles. Most Lowland handles were unadorned.

Another clear difference between examples made in each practice is the weight of hemispherical versus the conical censers. Troodos specimens, with their long handles extending from rim to base, weighed from 300 to 460 grams while those from Kornos measured between 180 to 225 grams. Only the thick solid rounded bases of the squat variety exclusive to the Lowland practice were heavier weighing 255 to 400 grams.

Wheel-thrown examples are clearly differentiated from the handmade pieces in terms of handle location (upper or lower as fig. 3:4), air vents (present or absent), pedestal stem (decorated or not), and perfectly circular thin bases. Their rims and handles are entirely void of embellishments, either decorative or symbolic. Few wheel-made clay copies had even a pair of air vents as in figure 3:4. In contrast, the holes were common on handmade version (figs. 2, 3, 5) although not all penetrated the wall fully and might be interpreted as residual or decorative (fig. 4). While air vents and incised markings can be considered as functional or symbolic essentials of incense burners, they are largely absent from the wheel-made censers.

Based on shape alone, one can discriminate among handmade censers from the two practices and from the wheel-thrown versions. Deeper bodies above a large ovoid base, a long handle reaching from rim to base, heavy weight, and abundant decorative additions characterized the Troodos Mountain examples. Quantitatively, the measurements of 38 censer rim and base diameters plus heights, from Kornos, Agios Demetrios, Fini, and Kaminaria reveal distinct differences in the overall proportions of those made in the two contemporaneous practices (London 2024b, 137–41). Even without measurements, the visual differences in the base shapes allow one to readily distinguish Troodos from Lowland censers.

Surface treatment: incised or applied religious and decorative symbols

The Troodos Mountain potters at all three villages decorated censer handles and rims with applied flowers, crosses, and scallops (London 2024b, 101, 135, 143, 145, 249–51). Lowland potters also scalloped or indented censer rims but did so without adding clay. Instead, they pinched or pushed the rim clay to form scallops or crenelations, except for rims of squat censers (London 2018). Squat censer rims can have three pieces of added clay in addition to a mark made where the handles joined the rim. In 1986 at Agios Demetrios, rims might have three added bits of clay but normally had as many as twelve points or bumps (London 2000, fig. 8.9).

The floral patterns that might occur on censers from Kornos were impressed rather than three-dimensional. From at least the early 20th century, Kornos potters fashioned two tools to decorate pots that were unknown in the Troodos Mountain practice. A rolling or rouletting tool (*trochoúdi*) created designs when rolled across the wet clay surface (Pieridou 1960, pl. 63; London et al. 1989, 46, fig. 57; London 2020, 79, fig. 8.10). Another tool exclusive to the Lowland practice was a spliced hollow piece of cane with four or five short notches at one end of a stalk. When impressed into wet clay it created a rosette pat-

tern. In contrast, the rosettes on Troodos pottery are usually three-dimensional clay additions to the wall. A cross might appear at the top of the handle, either incised, applied, or both on Troodos censers.

Incised or applied crosses were less frequent on Kornos censer handles. Instead, some display a mark at the top of the handle such as a circle of dots with or without another dot in the middle (fig. 5), or a triangular arrangement of three incised dots. The marks did not represent the signature of a potter. Jugs, cookware, and other pot types made by same potter lacked a similar mark. Kornos potters did not traditionally sign their work in contrast to the potters at Agios Demetrios and Kaminaria (London 2000, 164; 2024b, 175–78). In those villages, women incised the first initial of their name below the rim and close to the handle of jars, jugs, and cookware for reasons related to sales and distribution (London 2024b, 173–74).

An incised mark in the form of three dots arranged in a triangle has led to repeated discussions over the years at Kornos. Potters and villagers disputed the meaning or purpose of the mark. While some described it as representing the Trinity, others insisted it was simply decorative. Knud Jensen, who visited Kornos in 1971, reported noticing the symbol and asked the potters for an explanation or interpretation. No definitive answer was offered, but the majority designated the mark as decorative and belonging to an antiquated custom (London 2000, 72) according to an interpreter. Jensen subsequently witnessed a potter impress three circles on the handle of a censer (London 2000, fig. 8.6). The marks intrigued him given that he found them on censers seven years earlier in 1965 at a shop in Nicosia, where he was stationed in Cyprus.

Jensen had volunteered for the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus in 1964, 1965, and 1971. As in his native Denmark, he served as a civilian police detective and carried mail to remote locations throughout Cyprus. To research the meaning of the mark on incense burners, he expected that its original intention might have been preserved best at isolated locations rather than at Kornos. In the Agios Panteleimon convent at Agrokipia, in a region he described as "desolate", a nun informed him without hesitation that the mark represented the Trinity. She concurred with those at Kornos who provided that same interpretation for a mark found on incense burners for minimally sixty years from 1965 to 2024, and probably much earlier.

The ambiguity or flexibility of the meaning of the three dots prevailed among the public and explains why the handmade censers served the Christian and Muslim populations prior to division of the island in 1974. Both communities burned dried olive leaves in the bowl of the censer (see fig. 2 upper right) along with incense and a hot coal. An intangible difference in ritual practice between the two communities concerned the number of olive leaves burned. Muslim worshipers placed an odd number of leaves in the censer unlike the Christian population (per. com. M. Izil). Why might Muslims use an artifact with a "Christian" symbol? Muslims interpreted the mark as a decorative feature, as did several potters at Kornos. Christians might consider the symbol to represent a decorative flourish and/or the Trinity.

Who made incense burners, where, and why

In 1986 a difference in the output of incense burners was detected for specific villages. Members of the Kornos Cooperative regularly shaped a series of 10 or 12 censers for their customers. Similarly, Troodos Mountain potters at Fini might make a series of censers as part of their normal work. However, potters produced few censers at Agios Demetrios, where rather than shaping a series, they might fashion one censer at the end of the day with the clay that remained after shaping jugs, ovens, or jars. Their incense burners since 1986 were for personal use or family or for a neighbor. Potters in Agios Demetrios and Kaminaria concentrated on regular-sized containers while Fini potters focused on small decorative pieces and censers. In former times, Fini potters made the full repertoire of traditional pots. By the 1970s the need for handmade wares had greatly diminished with the availability of modern containers.

In 1962/63, a Fini potter who used local clays and fired her handmade pots in wood-burning kiln had begun to concentrate on making smaller pieces, such as decorative vases and incense burners according to her daughter, Eleni Platt (Christoforou) (per. com. July 2024). The year 1972 was the last time that an enormous wine fermentation jar was made at Fini which was renowned for its *pitharia*. Nevertheless, the reputation of the community as a source of ceramics has remained intact as of this writing. A well-travelled route to the higher altitude Troodos Mountain churches and monasteries skirts Fini. Both local and foreign visitors to those sacred locations have sustained the demand for incense burners. Once known for the full range of ceramic containers as well as huge jars, vats, and baptismal fonts, it is the smallest pot, the ritual censer that remains in production along with small decorated vases known as "*Finiótika*".

Agios Demetrios village, where potters produced a small number of censers, remains hidden in the forest and off the beaten track. Customers for pots rarely reach the village potters who normally transported their wares to their clientele or sold pottery at seasonal fairs. Incense burner production continues at Kornos. Potters no longer live or work at Klonari and Klirou.

Firing: the economic benefit of shaping large and small containers

To address the question of why potters who shaped ordinary household pots also produced incense burners, the answer could involve economics. The normal procedure for firing a kiln was to fill it with as many pots as possible. Pots of all shapes and sizes were included in the more than 40 kiln firings recorded from start to finish. Each firing began with small twigs by 8:00 AM. A slow-burning drying fire assured that the pots and kiln walls were thoroughly dry. The flame continued all day long, for 12 to 15 hours, as larger branches and logs were gradually added until the late evening hours (see London 2024b, 89 Table 8.1 for precise firing times).

The small censers and decorative juglets fired successfully inside jars and ovens or they were squeezed into every available space between pots stacked in the kiln (fig. 6). No dark-

ened smoke clouds or smudging occurred when pots touched each other. However, pots never had contact with the kiln walls or floor due to the risk of damage from the extremely hot structure. For a full account of the precise firing procedure at Agios Demetrios see London 2024b, 79–95.

The practice of firing small pots tucked into flowerpots, ovens, and jars, had several advantages. It allowed Kornos potters to simultaneously fire up to 375 pieces of all sizes in the kiln. In contrast, potters at Agios Demetrios fired under 200 regular-sized jugs, jars, and ovens (London 2016, 100 Table 3). It proved cost-effective and fuel efficient to produce the small censers to increase the pot count per kiln despite their low price of 0.50 cents or one quarter to one half the price of a regular sized jug or cooking pot in 1986.

To increase the pot count and lessen their costs, members of the Kornos Pottery Cooperative sometimes would share the expense of fuel costs and the fee charged by the Cooperative by firing their wares together. One woman might make the smaller pieces that would fit into the large jars, flowerpots, and ovens shaped by the other woman. It was nearly impossible to fill an entire kiln with small pots and no one would fire a half-empty kiln given the dangers of uneven heat flow and pockets of intense heat resulting in mis-firings.

Fig. 6. A fancy ovoid incense burner and other small pieces sits on the kiln wall waiting to go inside a large pot as a potter stacks the Kornos Cooperative kiln. A broken brick placed under an oven prevents the pot from touching the hot kiln floor. 1999 Kornos.

Consequently, it was beneficial for potters to make small pots or share a kiln with the Coop member who worked at her home. Economically it cost nothing for potters who shaped the regular sized pots to fire smaller pieces that fit inside their flowerpots, ovens, and jars.

Another benefit of firing incense burners and juglets inside larger pots was reduced breakage since the smaller pieces were less likely to move or slip down when packed into a larger pot. By minimizing the ability to shift during the firing, handles and other attachments were less apt to break. The practice of filling larger pieces with juglets and censers could account for the remarkably low rate of loss at Kornos. Based on counting the firing of over 1000 pots, the rate of loss is less than three percent (see London 2016, 100 for details).

Specialization in small clay pots, ritual or decorative

Eleni Platt (Christoforou) explained the circumstances that led her mother, Sofronia, to specialize in the production of smaller pieces including censers. Sofronia briefly stopped potting after the birth of her second child, Eleni, in 1955. Her husband objected to the work. Nevertheless, while her two daughters helped their grandmother prepare clay by picking out the small rocks mined together with the red clay, she gave them clay to play with as they watched her shape pots. In this manner the little girls learned the craft. Shortly afterwards, Sofronia began to make pots for her daughters to decorate with birds, flowers, snakes, and incised designs.

The family kiln for firing regular sized pots proved too large to fill with the small pots although they made many. As a result, Sofronia constructed a small kiln which she fired successfully on her third try. On visits to her workshop in 1986, 2000, and 2017 and until Sofronia reached the age of 92, she was still shaping juglets and incense burners. Eleni subsequently transferred her decorating skills to create celebratory cakes for ritual events, including weddings, birthdays, bachelor parties, and more. From fondant icing, she shaped the same images of birds, crosses, flowers, and snakes, as found on her pottery. More recently, she returned to making pottery given that her icing designs disappear with a few bites, unlike her creations in clay which last forever.

Discussion and relevance for archaeologists

Archaeological evidence for excavated objects that might be considered for "ritual" or "cultic" purposes focuses on their appearance or find spots. Items excavated in a secluded niche, portable or permanent shrine, and temple setting often receive a designation as ritualistic. In the southern Levant such items include unique and unusual or impractical non-utilitarian artifacts fashioned from clay such as: imported painted containers, unusual shapes (for example *rhyta* and pedestalled bowls or chalices), miniatures, figurines, multi-tiered decorated fenestrated stands, model shrines, snakes, and incense burners. In Cyprus, ancient figurines (Bolger 1996), models, and ceremonial vases are usually associated with ritual performances. From Bellapais *Vounous* for example, pots with human or animal figures on their rims are designated as ceremonial objects for funerary rituals along with "tulip bowls", described as requiring two hands to hold while consuming a beverage before passing the bowl to other participants (Webb 2016, 56). Alternatively, the *Vounous* containers represent artistic expressions created for their aesthetic appeal (Steel 2023).

Ordinary censers made by Cypriot traditional potters were for daily use rather than confined to special occasions. Erin Darby (per. com. February 2025) suggests that the ancient artifact from the Levant that most resembles Cypriot censers is the early first millennium B.C.E. "perforated vessel" like those excavated by Nelson Glueck between 1938 and 1940 in southern Jordan at Tell el-Kheleifeh. These small wheel-thrown objects 10 to 11 cm tall and wide have one small loop handle from rim to body and three

knob-like feet. Two rows of punched air holes penetrate the body (Pratico 1993, pl. 29). These Iron Age censers along with others (Crowfoot 1940, 150–53) are of interest here given that Tell el-Kheleifeh, located 500 m north of the Gulf between Aqaba and Eilat, was possibly an industrial village with metallurgical operations. Slag, copper ore, along with metal nails, fishhooks, fibulae, rings, weights, and arrowheads are among the finds (Pratico 1993, 4, 65–7). The censers lay not far from the proposed furnaces, implying that they may have played a role in blessing copper production.

At Saruq al-Hadid, in Dubai, late second millennium B.C.E. Iron Age deposits include furnaces to process metal along with the raw mineral, ingots, slag, as well as "ritualised" deposits. The latter are "marked by the presence of 'incense' burners decorated with snake appliqués" and while not concentrated near the furnaces, were located at slightly higher elevations where Bronze Age debris "appears to have been a focal point for ritual activities" (Weeks et al. 2023, 242, 243 and see London 2024b, 151–55 for the prevalence of snakes on traditional and ancient pottery and Kyriacou 2021 for snakes in Cypriot religious practices). The suggestion is that successful metal production required divine help, not unlike the prayers said when lighting a kiln to fire pottery at Kornos. Cypriot potters brought their household incense burner to bless the kiln while initiating the fire. The devastating loss of a single kiln firing could destroy the work of one or more potters for an entire month.

Points of purchase for incense burners

Ethnoarchaeological research can suggest various possibilities concerning who made objects for ritual use, where they worked, and how people acquired new incense burners. The methods to obtain a new censer and other handmade pots have changed through time and were dictated in part by location. Kornos was within reach at the center of the island for urbanites and villagers. Customers went there to choose the pots they needed. In addition, male family members loaded Kornos pots on a donkey, in a cart, or bus to reach customers as well. People who lived along the coastal strips and foothills waited for someone selling pottery to reach them. In the hill country and northern part of the island, villagers visited seasonal fairs at church settings where they could acquire a range of material goods, consumables, and pottery. The fairs took place at the same spot each year on or near church grounds although they were non-church related events where people traded and bartered for necessities. Agios Demetrios potters participated in the fairs to exchange pots for basic foodstuffs needed to survive the winter months prior to the mid-20th century. The potters rented a bus which they stocked with pottery and traveled as a group. Other female potters were accompanied by their husbands. When cars and buses became more widely available, a male family member might distribute pots to customers at neighboring villages downslope and along the coast. People in the Troodos Mountains had the option to visit Fini to buy pots, but hardly anyone arrived at Agios Demetrios, which is buried in the lush pine forest.

Today, imported censers are sold at large grocery stores on roads to the Troodos. Alternatively, stalls near or on the road leading monasteries sell wheel-thrown local or imported censers lacking decoration. In 1986, on the road leading a monastery, the husband of last potter of Kaminaria sold her handmade pots along with Kornos censers that he had purchased.

Who made and sold IB and other artifacts used for ritual purposes

For older female potters without a spouse or family members to mine and prepare the clay with her, expediency might play a role in focusing on smaller shapes, such as censers. Small pots not only required a smaller kiln but less wood to be gathered or chopped for fuel. The pots can be fired together with someone else's in their kiln. In general, the production of censers is suitable work for widows or the elderly and someone without a husband or male family member to help mine and prepare clay or carry the regular sized pots to customers beyond the village.

Differentiating contemporaneous incense burners made at different places

For censers shaped from local red clays, their overall shape, size, weight, and surface treatment allows one to assign their place of origin. Archaeologists regularly record clay color and measure heights as well as rim and base diameters when drawing ancient pottery. These same features, when combined with the technique of manufacture and surface treatment, signal incense burners made at contemporaneous but separate practices.

Jugs to enhance the sound of the human voice in sacred settings

In addition to the use of incense burners in church settings, ordinary water jugs play a nearly invisible role in places of worship. Jugs have been judiciously placed in niches high on the walls of sacred spaces for centuries to enhance the resonance of the human voice. In European churches constructed from the 10th to 16th centuries, acoustical pots stood in niches close to the ceiling. Texts of the seventeenth century refer to the ancient Roman engineer, Marcus Vitruvius (ca. 50 B.C.E.), who described bronze and earthenware vessels as voice enhancers in theaters since the first century B.C.E. (Valière et al. 2013). The same practice occurs in Cyprus to this day, as at Kornos and elsewhere (London 2024b, 163; 2026).

In March 2018, refurbishing work on the old church exposed jugs in the uppermost walls below the domed roof at the pottery-producing village of Kornos (fig. 7). The jugs were made by local village potters a century ago, when the church was built in the early 20th century. What is most relevant for the topic at hand, is that the jugs were broken, chipped, cracked, or without a handle (fig. 8). Early 20th century villagers repurposed bro-

Fig. 7. Scaffolding reaches jugs on shelves near the ceiling of the old church at Kornos, Cyprus (courtesy of Michael Savva, 2018).

Fig. 8. Jugs with broken rims together in a niche at the Kornos church (courtesy of Michael Savva, 2018).

ken pots rather than place pristine pieces in the church walls. The jugs show evidence of drip marks as if they had been used which accounts for the chipped rims and missing handles. Some jugs might have been damaged during the firing and were never suitable as water containers. Pots were also embedded into floors in Cyprus, as at Lazania village (London 2026, fig. 14:13).

Pots in church ceilings amplify the human voice given that the pots "decreased the reverberation time at frequencies strongly excited by the spoken voice." (Valière et al. 2013, 77). In Belarus, church walls at Kołoża, near Grodno (per. com., Anna Gruszczyńska-Ziółkowska, 2020), have "large pots built in horizontally with holes to the inside for acoustics. These were the so-called "holoshniks", which were also found in the walls of St. Basil's Church in Owrucz, built around the year 1000 by Vladdzimir I" (Gloger 1903, 9, automatic translation by DeepL.com). Near Frankfurt at the St. Walburga church and towers, refurbishing efforts found 100 plus pots dating to the 9th century in the walls and floor (Meschede - St. Walburga).

Synagogues and mosques likewise had pots embedded in their walls. Construction of a 15th century synagogue at Tomar in Portugal involved positioning acoustic pots in the corners of the ceiling (Moreira 2021). In the dome of the 16th century Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul, 224 clay pots embedded into the wall contributed to the overall sound quality (Atay et al. 2023).

In Cyprus no prohibition existed against recycling broken jugs in sacred spaces. The possibly irreverent reuse of broken pots occurred even in the largest pottery-producing community of the island. The implication is that clay pots for use in religious places need not be pristine, new, intact, or in any other way special or made by specialists. The same seems to apply for the incense burners which were not the work of people affiliated with the church or the produced under special order by any ruling authority.

The reuse of old and damaged pottery in sacred spaces suggests that their makers and users may have been less important than the functionality of the pottery. New, clean, perfect pots were not a high priority for objects connected with ritual practices. Incense burners in the homes of the current descendants of Cypriot potters remain in use despite their flaws, chips, or other damages. Households often had multiple censers – one for regular use and another curated older example made by a grandparent or relative.

Votives made of wax in Cyprus

Handmade or mold-made wax votive offerings are produced in Cyprus by the same craftsmen who fashion candles for use in churches. Wax babies, heads, legs, arms, and internal organs are made at a workshop in Larnaca not far from an important church (Carroll 2018). Shops selling wax candles and effigies of life-size statues and smaller forms for sale in Cyprus are a public source for votive offerings (Connelly 1989, 216). Terra cotta votives of life-size infants in early Roman era sanctuaries in Italy, from the 4th to 2nd centuries B.C.E., have been considered as thanks offerings for successful births and comparable to the wax babies recently placed in Cypriot churches (Carroll 2018). The candles connect with the tradition of wax votive statuary that persists in Cyprus although the practice has disappeared in mainland Greece (Connelly 1989, 217). Like the clay incense burners made by regular potters, recent craftspeople unaffiliated with the church fashion wax votives sold in the marketplace.

Conclusions

Pottery incense burners and rosewater dispensers, like wax votives destined for use in sacred spaces in Cyprus, were the products of craftspeople unconnected to the church or any other official body. The potters worked at home or in dedicated workspaces separate from where they lived, as did those who created the wax votives. The male and female craft specialists responsible for shaping ritual items produced ordinary pottery as well. The professional craftspeople produced the wax votives as well as candles for use at church. Both the Christian and Muslim populations utilized red clay censers as a result of different interpretations of incised markings. Damaged censers remain in household use despite chips or cracks. Broken, damaged, and chipped jugs were recycled in church ceilings to enhance the sound of worshippers' prayers. The sale of censers outside monastery grounds or on the route worshippers took to reach churches could be a faint hint of ritual artifacts made and fired at or close to a sacred space. Incense burners and votives can be purchased at shops, at the home of private potters, at the office of the Kornos Pottery Cooperative, or at stalls leading to major sacred places.

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Approaching the Divine: Material Traces of Donor Memory in Late Antique Christian Shrines (4th–5th Centuries CE)[1]

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Abstract
The pivotal changes for Christianity at the turn of the 4th and the 5th centuries brought about a gradual definition of Christian worship spaces. Within them, the sacred cores – the altar and the holy sites – were progressively isolated from the community. This paper investigates how donors approached these cores through two examples joint into one case study: the shrine of S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana (Rome) and the Water Newton Treasure (British Museum). The cemetery shrine was completely renovated in the early 5th century, improving the cult of the martyrs buried there. This intervention led to the gradual 'appropriation' of the shrine by new religious and lay donors through the patronage of monuments and personal burials. The Water Newton Treasure was found in 1975 in the Romano-British town of Durobrivae (UK). Dating to the late 4th / early 5th century, it is the earliest known example of Christian liturgical and votive silverware. It can be related to S. Alessandro to show how the offering of vessels and ex-votos were alternative ways to approach the sacred cores of the shrine. Backed by written sources, these examples allow us to grasp the complexity of the shrine as a combination of architectural setting, liturgical paraphernalia, and votives. The memory of donors was embedded within it in a multi-layered association with the martyrs, God, and the community. Rooted in ancient polytheisms, these practices highlight both the continuities and changes in the Christian system of beliefs.

Keywords: Altar space, dedicatory inscriptions, epitaphs, ex-votos, liturgical implements, martyrs' burials, S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Water Newton Treasure

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1 Introduction: The Sacred Environment and the Divine in 4th- and Early-5th-Century CE Christianity

The establishment of Constantinian religious policy in the early decades of the 4th century CE brought about pivotal changes for Christianity (Cameron 2006, 96–103; Cameron 2011, 32–36). First as a protected cult, then as the state religion of the Empire, Christianity experienced exponential growth in both the number of believers and the economic resources of the Church[2]. Christian spaces of worship were first purposefully built under Constantine and proliferated throughout the 4th century (Blaauw 2016, 553–562; Blaauw 2024; Bowes 2011, 53–55; Liccardo 2005, 144–146; Sotinel 2005, 411–434; Yasin 2012, 937–947).

Two main phenomena emerged in the progressive definition of such environments: the monumentalisation of holy sites and the creation of sacred spaces[3]. The former were site-bound and depended on a holy physical element that allowed connection with the divine – e.g., a sacralised topographical feature or a martyr's burial. On the other hand, sacred space was mostly on human ritual action, and could potentially be located anywhere – e.g., community or episcopal churches[4]. These two realities, which often mixed and overlapped, had one or more nuclei that shaped the surrounding environment[5]. In the case of the holy site, this was the holy element around which the whole shrine was built. Within the sacred space, the core of the main ritual actions was the altar[6].

A common type of holy site was the martyr's tomb. Martyrs were seen as imitators of Christ because of their violent death in the name of Christianity (Stroumsa 2008, 145–146) – hence, their privileged access to the heavenly world and role as potential mediators with the divine through their material remains (Bernier-Farella 2015; Brandenburg 1995; Brown 2015a, 3–4; Elsner 1995, 221–239; Stroumsa 2008). The parallel emergence of the martyrs' cult[7] and the ritualisation of the Eucharist[8] – the re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice as the core of the whole liturgy – led to the progressive seclusion of the most sacred

2 See (Cameron 2006, 96–103; Cameron 2011, 32–36). For the relationship between the Church and wealth, see (Brown 2015b; Janes 1998; Holman 2008).

3 For the distinction between holy sites and sacred spaces, see (Bacci 2021, 15–29).

4 (Bacci 2021, 17–18); cf. Sotinel's 'lieux de culte' and 'lieux saints' (respectively sacred spaces and holy sites), (Sotinel, 2005, 419–425). On the sacralising role of ritual and liturgy, see (Blaauw 2024, 24–26).

5 (Gianandrea and Scirocco 2021, 74–76; Yasin 2009, 157–188). Altars could be built over martyrs' tombs or martyrs' relics could be hosted within altars, see (Brandenburg 1995; Palladino 2022, 77–83; Yasin 2009, 151–156, 171–188; Yasin 2015).

6 (Blaauw 2024, 24–26). On the roots of the Christian altar's sacredness, see (Heid 2024, 27–68).

7 The veneration of martyrs as mediators with the divine can be seen in the establishment of shrines and pilgrimage routes and in the use of relics to consecrate other spaces. On shrines and pilgrimage routes, see (Sotinel 2005, 414, 422–425; Spera 2007; Spera 2012; Cantino Wataghin and Pani Ermini 1995–1997, 123–151: 127–132). On relics and the ritual of consecration, see (Foletti 2018, 15–50; Palladino 2022, 77–83; Yasin 2015, 133–152).

8 (Blaauw 2024, 24–25; Caseau 2002; Larson-Miller 2018, 539–543). On the connection between Eucharist and martyrial tombs, cf. (Spera 2007).

hearts of both Christian holy sites and sacred spaces. Only the clergy could enter the sanctuary of the church and grant access to venerated sites[9].

Getting and staying as close as possible to the shrine's centres was thus key to encountering the divine and its salvific power, mediated through both prayer and liturgy. Acknowledging their inaccessibility, new strategies were developed to secure the presence of donors close to the main means of contact with the divine – the liturgy at the altar and the holy bodies in the martyrs' burials. Such strategies played with the complex reality of these shrines, intertwining the memory of the person within their composite fabric of architecture, monuments, furnishings, and objects.

This paper will discuss how donors approached the sacred environment of the Christian shrine through material culture. Two examples will be presented as a single case study, focusing on the suburbs of Rome. First, the archaeological remains of the early 5th-century funerary shrine of S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana will be examined (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 202–413; Nisio and Bersani 2021, 337–346; Pergola 2015, 695–702). Its sacred cores and the monumental approaches used by donors to get as close as possible to them will be highlighted. The focus will then shift to the Water Newton Treasure (Painter 2006). Dated between the second half of the 4th century and the early 5th, it represents the earliest known material evidence of Christian liturgical paraphernalia. Through its objects, we can appreciate how believers associated themselves with the liturgy and the holy sites by donating vessels and votive offerings.

2 Monumental Presence and Funerary Evidence: The Early 5th-Century Renovation of S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana (Rome)

The funerary shrine of S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana stood on a catacomb complex dating from the late 3rd or early 4th century, about 12 km from Rome (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 223–270) [Fig. 1]. Among the various burials, three belonged to martyrs: Alexander, Eventius and Theodul. Their presence sparked monumentalisation as early as the second half of the 4th century[10]. The complex was completely renovated in the early 5th century CE, and continued to be used and developed until the late 6th century, only to be abandoned in the 9th century[11]. It was not until the mid-19th century that S. Alessandro was

9 This rule was common to all Christian region, see (Blaauw 2024, 25; Caseau 2002, 140–143; Caseau 2012; Gianandrea and Scirocco 2021, 78–79).

10 The first monumentalisation of the site as a shrine probably occurred in the context of Pope Damasus' promotion of the veneration of martyrs' tombs in Rome: see (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 271–321: 318–320). On Damasus' policy, see (Duval 1988, 55–59, 97; Palladino 2022, 79–80; Spera 1994; Spera 2007) with further bibliography.

11 For the interventions at S. Alessandro after the 5th century CE and the definitive abandonment of the site, see (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 380–412). The latter was due to the misidentification of St Alexander with a 2nd-century pope of the same name, around the 6th century. This led Pope Paschal I (p. 817–824) to have the martyrs' remains moved to churches in Rome, thus depriving the shrine of its original significance (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 220–221, 408–412).

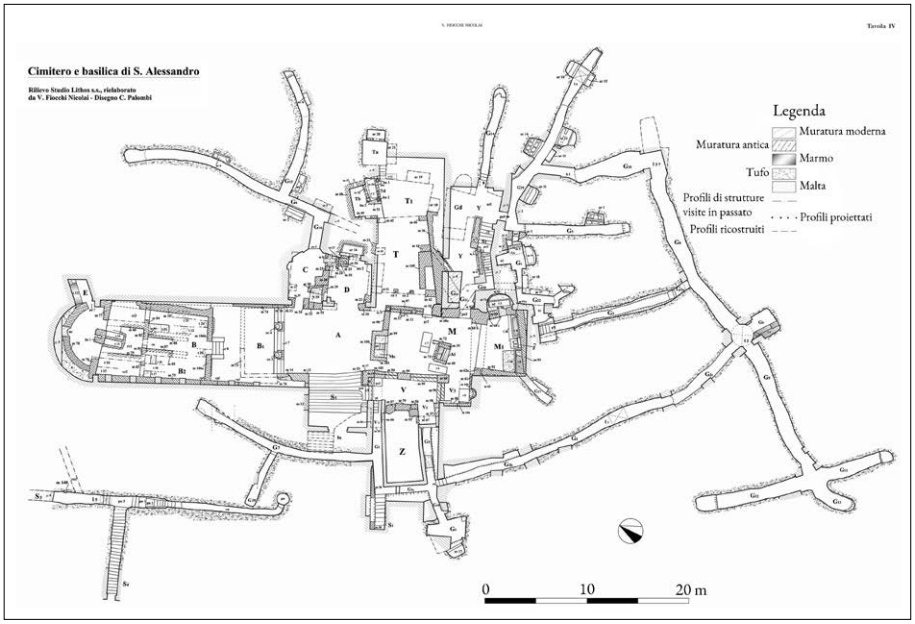

Fig. 1. Ground plan of the catacomb and shrine of S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Rome. From Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, pl. IV, © Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana.

discovered and excavated. Alternating periods of abandonment and further explorations followed until it was restored and secured in the 1960s[12]. This paper will focus on the renewal of the shrine in the early 5th century and its subsequent funerary use.

Some forty years after its construction in the 4th-century, the shrine was extensively rebuilt and enlarged. Large sections of the catacomb and the former rooms dedicated to the veneration of the martyrs were destroyed or severely altered (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 322–361). Because of the prohibition to move holy bodies and the importance of the martyrs, the whole renovation process was carried out around their original burials[13]. Indeed, the two interment spots – one for Theodul and the other for Alexander and Eventius – were the holy sites that nourished the sacredness of the whole shrine [Fig. 1, burials t1 and t2]. The respective cult rooms were enlarged and their entrances monumentalised by reusing early Imperial columns (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 322–346) [Fig. 1, rooms M-M1 and T-T1]. The access staircase to the shrine was almost doubled in size to facilitate the passage of the faithful [Fig. 1, staircase S5], and a completely new basilica was built by excavating the tuff at the northwestern end of the complex (Fiocchi Nicola 2009, 346–360) [Fig. 1, basilica B-B1; fig. 2]. With

12 For an overview of the research on S. Alessandro from its discovery in 1854 to 2009, see (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 202–218).

13 See t1 and t2 on [Fig. 1]. For the ban on moving holy bodies from their burials in Rome, see (Foletti 2018, 39–45; Hermann-Mascard 1975, 35–37; Palladino 2022, 79–80).

Fig. 2. The Basilica B seen from the central atrium A, S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Rome. From Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 348 fig. 326, © Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana.

the addition of the latter and its altar, a new sacred focus was added to the shrine (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 357–358). S. Alessandro is thus a good example of the coexistence of holy sites – the martyrs' tombs – and sacred space – the basilica – within the same sanctuary.

The destruction of the old shrine and the development of the new complex created space around the sacred cores of the sanctuary. Archaeological evidence testifies to two main strategies adopted by donors to approach such a space: associating their names with the main monuments and seeking burial near the altar and holy sites.

2.1 Renovating the Shrine, Marking the Donors' Presence

The monumental presence of the donors was supported by the belief that the name carried part of the person's 'aura' and personality – an idea that extended to all forms of gift-giving (Bauer 2009, 59–65). At S. Alessandro this practice is materialized in two surviving inscriptions from the early 5th century renovations: one on a martyrs' monument, the other on the basilica itself, both affirming the enduring presence of the donor within the sacred space.

Like the rooms constructed around them, the monuments encapsulating the burials were refurbished during the early 5th-century. Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai has convincingly reconstructed how these interventions dealt with the pre-existing memorials (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 325–327, 338–343). The latter marked the holy sites with box-shaped monuments. Sts Eventius and Alexander's was surmounted by a ciborium with inscriptions of the donors who had commissioned it[14]. During the renovations in early 5th century, the former memorials were completely covered with marble slabs and new transennas

14 The donors' dedication survives on the plinths of the ciborium's columns [Fig. 4] (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 308–313).

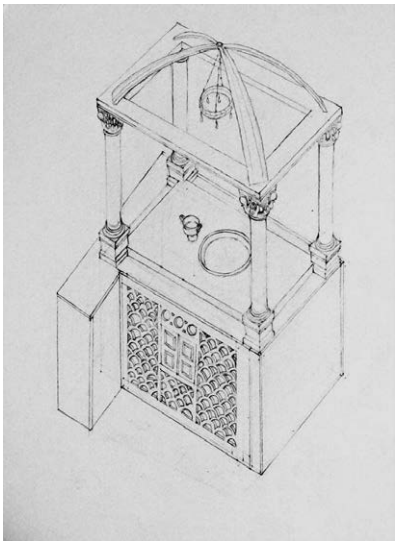

Fig. 3. Reconstructive drawing of the 5th-century monument and altar of the martyrs Eventius and Alexander at S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana. © Nicolas Samaretz.

Fig. 4. John-Henry Parker, detail from a picture of the monument of the martyrs Eventius and Alexander at S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Rome, 1864–1866. From the Archive of the British School at Rome, © British School at Rome Research Collections, John-Henry Parker Collection, jhp-0383.

closed them at the front [Fig. 3]. These operations improved the two funerary monuments, making them suitable for use as altars (Brown 2015a, 9–10; Heid 2024, 303–311). The one erected on the burials of Sts Alexander and Eventius has survived in a better – though fragmentary – state [Figs. 3–4][15]. While preserving some of the previous elements, such as the 4th-century ciborium, this restyling allowed the 'appropriation' of this important place by new patrons. The new transenna covering the front was centred on a rectangular opening in the middle – the so-called *fenestella confessionis* – which served as a 'window' to look inwards at the holy burials, and possibly to reach them with one's hands or textile fragments [Fig. 4][16]. As such, it framed the access point to the sacred. It

15 The marble cladding and the new transennas, with the addition of a porphyry slab at the top (in the case of the monument to Sts Alexander and Eventius) are all hints in this direction. It is uncertain whether the monuments also served as altars in the previous phase. See (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 325, 338–339, 343).

16 This practice was used to create contact relics, i.e. materials (textiles, liquids, oils, soil, etc.) that acquired the site's holiness via physical contact with the burial or even directly with the martyr's body.

Fig. 5. Detail of the dedicatory inscription from the monument of the martyrs Eventius and Alexander, early 5th century CE, marble, room M, S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Rome. From Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 340 fig. 321, © Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana.

Fig. 6. Architrave with the inscription of Bishop Ursus, early 5th century, marble, S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Rome. From Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 359 fig. 344, © Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana.

is therefore unsurprising to find a donative inscription on it (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 340) [Figs. 4–5].

> *[- - -] et Alexandro Delicatus voto posuit / dedi/can/te ae/pis/cop(o) / Urs(o)*
>
> Delicatus has erected [this monument to the saint martyrs Eventius] and Alexander as a vow, consecrated [by] bishop Ursus[17]

The inscription originally completed by mention of the other martyr, Eventius, recalls Delicatus, the donor who offered the transenna, and Ursus, the bishop who dedicated the monument. Interestingly, the bishop's section seems to be a slightly later addition, given its position on the side [Fig. 5]. By adding his name and title, the bishop partially 'appropriated' Delicatus' donation and marked one of the most sacred spots of the shrine with

Written and material evidence has survived from various areas of the Roman Empire; see (Bauer 2009, 63–64; Foletti 2018, 42–44; Palladino 2022, 80; Yasin 2015, 146).

17 Transcription and analysis in (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 340–341). The English translation is by the author.

his presence and religious authority[18]. This is perhaps not surprising if we identify Ursus as the main promoter of the shrine's renovation. Indeed, in the early 5th century, the funerary site and the sanctuary of S. Alessandro were under the jurisdiction of the episcopate of Nomentum, a local episcopal see usually appointed by and dependent on the pope[19].

This seems to be supported by an architrave that once belonged to the basilica and bears the name of Bishop Ursus (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 358–360) [Fig. 6].

((crux monogrammatica)) / Christi signifer Ursus

Ursus the bearer of Christ's insignia (i. e., bishop)[20]

Fiocchi Nicolai suggested that its original position was on the wall supporting the monumental arch framing the altar area[21]. If this is correct, we can imagine a similar architrave on the other side completed the dedicatory inscription of the new church[22]. Much larger than the transenna's inscription, the architrave's would have been visible to all the faithful gathered in the basilica for the liturgy. It served as a clear statement of the connection between the bishop, once again recalled as a religious authority, and the core of the sacred space – as well as the shrine as a whole – that he had built[23].

The self-promotion of private donors and bishops via monumental interventions followed the ancient tradition of euergetism, which was still alive in Late Antiquity (Foletti 2018, 37–39; Lepelley 1998, 17–33; Pietri 1978). Although bishops had not yet acquired full civil powers, the spread of Christianity among the elite in the 4th and 5th centuries resulted in an increasing number of Roman aristocrats to accept the bishopric as an honour (Lepelley 1998, 23–27, 32–33). They introduced the traditional practices of euergetism and patronage into the Christian context, as both means of display and as a form of giving back to the community (Lepelley 1998, 21–22, 26–33).

18 (Fiocchi Nicolai p. 340). Ursus possibly dedicated the remodelling of a similar monument to the martyr Sebastian in the Catacomb of S. Sebastiano when he was still a presbyter under Pope Innocent I (p. 401–411), see (Pergola 2015, 695–697).

19 Nomentum was a town to the northeast of Rome in the Sabina area. The main written evidence for this situation is a letter from Pope Innocent I (p. 401–417 CE) in which a shrine (identified with S. Alessandro) is the subject of a dispute among local bishops; see (Dunn 2011; Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 222).

20 Transcription and analysis in (Fiocchi Nicolai pp. 358–360). The English translation is by the author.

21 Fiocchi Nicolai referred to the study by Pasquale Testini: (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 358–359 n. 1691; Testini 1969, 726–727).

22 Fiocchi Nicolai recalled an earlier study by Antonio Ferrua who identified the surviving inscription as part of a hexameter, the first part of which would have been on the now lost architrave. See (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 359–360).

23 Both monumental images of bishops and epigraphy were used in this sense, often together, see (Foletti 2018, 37–39; Liverani 2016, 185–197). On Bishop Ursus, his ecclesiastical career, and the intervention at S. Alessandro, (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 359–362; Pergola 2015).

2.2 *Resting Close to the Sacred*

If inscribing one's name near the religious centres of the shrine ensured that this person would be present there to a certain extent, being buried within its soil pushed this concept even further. Interment near a holy tomb meant proximity to the martyrs' remains. This proximity allowed the deceased to benefit from their intercession in the afterlife – the so-called inhumation *ad sanctos* (near the saints) (Brown 2015a, 27–28; Duval 1988). On the other hand, burial near the altar (*ad altare*) meant the departed would always participate, albeit passively, in the rituals performed there[24]. The Christian understanding of the afterlife is essential, to grasp the significance of this issue. Based on a dualistic view, it juxtaposed the earthly and divine worlds, body and soul, as opposite but intertwined elements[25]. Earthly life was only a passage before eternal life could begin – hence the importance of death as a 'second birth' (Bolaños-Herrera 2023, 72; Mazzoleni 2015, 458). Yet, the deceased body was not left behind forever. With the belief in the resurrection at the end of time, a person's remains were seen as only temporarily separated from their soul (Brown 2015a, 2–3). Therefore, proper inhumation – ideally near the sacred – was considered essential for the soul's ultimate salvation[26]. This framework lay behind the progressive occupation of Christian funerary and martyr shrines by burials from the mid-4th century onwards.

As a funerary site, S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana has been suitable for hosting burials since its foundation[27]. The early-5th-century interventions strengthened its 'shrine character' and created a monumental space for private burials – even destroying preexisting sepulchres[28]. The continuous funerary use in the following decades, until the late 6th century, testify to the long duration of this new setting (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 362–379). The preserved burials and funerary inscriptions are the most valuable evidence of this practice.

Funerary inscriptions or epitaphs acted as a visible counterpart to the body and were the 'screens' that interacted with the living visitors to the shrine. Indeed, they located the burial and advertised the identity of the deceased. At the same time, as Ann M. Yasin has pointed out, the relative uniformity of the epitaphs emphasized the communitarian background of church burials[29]. Nevertheless, being buried in the shrine allowed the display

24 (Duval 1988, 55–56; Palladino 2022, 77–78, 82; Yasin 2005, 446–447). This was combined with an increasing association of the Eucharist with donations and alms for the dead, expressed in the introduction of masses celebrated for the dead: (Magnani 2009, 1029–1031).

25 (Bolaños-Herrera 2023, 72–74; Magnani 2009, 1029). For a comparison with pre-Christian Roman traditions, see (Chioffi 2015, 641–644).

26 On this point, the positions of the late antique Church Fathers (above all St Augustine) and the common practice of believers did not always coincide, with the former stressing the greater importance of one's deeds in life: see (Duval 1988, 3–46).

27 This was also due to its position outside the city perimeter, in accordance with the ancient Roman law forbidding urban burials: see (Hermann-Mascard 1975, 35–37; Yasin 2005, 433 n. 2).

28 Some of the funerary gravestones were re-used for the new paving of the shrine: see (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 380–387).

29 This was also true of funerary rituals,which strengthened the community identity. Thus, funerary basilicas also functioned as memorial monuments for the Christian congregation (Yasin 2005, 444–451).

Fig. 7. Gravestone of the *Vir Spectabilis* Epiphanius, 458 CE, annex E, basilica A, S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Rome. From Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 356 fig. 341, © Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana.

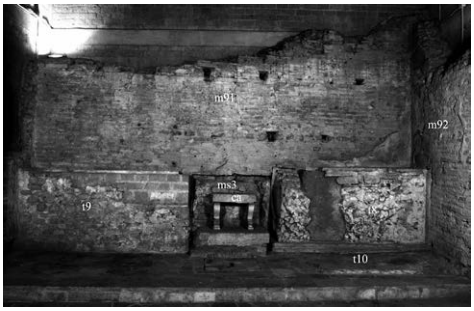

Fig. 8. Sepulchres of the *Honestae Feminae* Pascasia and Constantina, mid-5th century CE, room M1, room M, S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Rome. From Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 337 fig. 319, © Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristian.

of an unusual social status and privilege (Yasin 2005, 446–447). And the position was a key element in such a display (Duval 1988, 51–98). The most prominent sacred features of the shrine acted as poles of attraction around which the burials gathered. As we have seen, for S. Alessandro such poles can be identified in the holy tombs of the martyrs and in the basilica's altar [Fig. 1, burials t1 and t2, altar bs1]. In both cases burials were found in the surrounding area.

Although the original floor of the basilica has not survived, excavations have revealed numerous tombs beneath it. It is no coincidence that they are concentrated in the north-western half of the building, towards the altar[30]. The gravestone of only one of these tombs has been preserved in situ. It belonged to Epiphanius *vir spectabilis* (lit. 'admirable man'), a member of the senatorial aristocracy who was buried in 458 [Fig. 1, burial t12; fig. 7][31]. The inscription reads:

30 The basilica yielded twelve tombs [Fig. 1, tombs t13–24]. See (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 362, 365, 368–369, pl. IV).

31 The lay members of the senatorial aristocracy continued to write their titles on Christian epitaphs, following the Roman custom: see (Bolaños-Herrera 2023, 76). For late antique imperial elite titles and their epigraphic use, see (Salway 2015, 381–384).

Fig. 9. Gravestone of the *Honesta Femina* Pascasia, 454 CE, room M1, room M, S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Rome. From Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 371 fig. 361, © Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana.

> *Requiescit in pace v(ir) s(pectabilis) Epifanius vixit / ann(os) XXV rec(essit) d(ie) XIIII k(a)l(en das) nob(embres) con(sulatu) d(omini) n(ostri) Maior(ani)*
>
> The vir spectabilis Epiphanius rests in peace, [who] lived 25 years [and] passed away [on the] 13th day [of the] kalends of November [under the] consulate [of] our lord Majorian[32]

Epiphanius' sepulchre stood out for its location: a small funerary chamber designed exclusively for him, in direct contact with the apsidal area [Fig. 1, room E][33]. This, together with his title, made Epiphanius one of the most distinguished persons buried at S. Alessandro.

In the martyrs' cult rooms, evidence of burials has been found in the form of underground tombs and sarcophagi, mostly in masonry covered with marble slabs (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 369–377) [Fig. 1, burials t3, t5–11, t28, ar18–21]. Most of them are in a poor state of preservation, although in room M – housing Sts Alexander and Evenitus' monument – two such sarcophagi can still be seen in their position [Fig. 1, burials t8–9; fig. 8]. Their covering slabs bear inscriptions identifying the women who were originally buried there [Fig. 9]:

> *Pa[sca]sia h(onesta) f(emina) in pace / vixit a[n]n(os) LC[I]II d(e)p(osita) d(ie) VIIII kal(endas) / Febra(rias) post cons(ulatum) Opilionis v(iri) c(larissimi)*

32 Transcription and analysis in (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 356–357). The English translation is by the author.

33 According to Testini and Fiocchi Nicolai, the small room of Epiphanius' burial was planned during the construction of the basilica, although it was only built at a second moment, between the early 5th century and 458. See (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 357; Testini 1969, 725–726).

Fig. 10. Gravestone of Subdeacon Appianus, 448 CE, room T, S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Rome. From Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 375 fig. 365, © Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristian.

Fig. 11. Gravestone of Bishop Adeodatus, late 5th / early 6th century CE, room T, S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana, Rome. From Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 375 fig. 366, © Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana.

> The honesta femina Pascasia [rests] in peace, [who] lived 53 years [and was] buried [on the] 9th day of the kalends of February under the consulate of the vir clarissimus Opilio[34]

> *[Cons]tan[t]ina h(onesta) f(emina) in pace vixit ann(os) XXV / [dep(osita)] VII id(us) Apr(i)l(es) Costantino et Rufo cons(ulibus)*

> The honesta femina Constantina [rest] in peace, [who] lived 25 years [and was] buried [on the] 7th day of the ides of April [under] the consuls Constantine and Rufus[35]

As in the case of Epiphanius, these epitaphs show that certain elite members sought to display their status and proximity to the holy sites[36]. Their prominent position, directly facing the martyrs' monument, and the form of their burials would have set them apart within the entire cult room. The dating – 454 for Pascasia and 457 for Constantina – demonstrate the continued use of S. Alessandro as a privileged burial site, driven by the ongoing veneration of the martyrs' sepulchres.

The other cult room, dedicated to the martyr Theodul, has also yielded evidence of burials. Among these, two slabs are particularly interesting, although their original posi-

34 Transcription and analysis in (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 370–371). The English translation is by the author.

35 Transcription and analysis in (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 372–373). The English translation is by the author.

36 *Honesta femina* was one of the feminine titles used among senatorial families, (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 370–371 n. 1728, 397).

tion in the room is uncertain. In these cases, the burials were of members of the clergy, a subdeacon and a bishop [Figs. 10–11].

> *Hic quiescet Appianus subdiaconus qui vixit annu[s] / XXXII dies XXVIIII d(epositus) III idus Apri(les) cons(ulatu) Postumiani v(iri) c(larissimi)*
>
> Here rests the subdeacon Appianus who lived 32 years [and] 28 days [and was] buried on the 3rd day of the ides of April [under the] consulate of the vir clarissimus Postumianus[37]

> *((crux)) Hic requiescit in pace Adeodatus episc(opus) qui vixit ann(os) / pl(us) m(inus) LXVII et sed(it) ann(os) II et m(enses) VIIII dep(ositus) sub d(ie) prid(ie) kal(endas) Decemb(res)*
>
> Here rests in peace Bishop Adeodatus who lived approximately 67 years and held office for 2 years and 9 months [and was] laid [to rest] around the first day of the kalends of December[38]

Appianus was buried in 448 while Bishop Adeodatus was buried at the end of the 5th or beginning of the 6th century. Both testify to the funerary use of the shrine of S. Alessandro by the clergy. Moreover, Adeodatus' inscription highlights the continuity of the importance given to this place by the bishops of Nomentum, still at the turn of the 6th century[39].

Despite the lack of evidence, it seems likely that Bishop Ursus was also buried in the shrine[40]. After all, he marked the main areas of the renovated shrine with his name, and Adeodatus's grave seems to speak of a similar custom some hundred years later. If we identify S. Alessandro with the shrine mentioned in Innocent I's letter, this would be further proof of the importance already attached to these martyr burials in Ursus' time[41].

Like the monumental inscriptions, the church burials were also addressed to the faithful who visited the shrine. Located in the community's shared spaces, where rituals and prayers were performed, they were highly exposed and visible to the eyes of the living

37 Transcription and analysis in (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 374–375). The English translation is by the author.

38 Transcription and analysis in (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 374–375). The English translation is by the author.

39 At least two other bishops were buried in the shrine, although the location of their burials is unknown: Petrus, likely between the mid-4th and 5th centuries, and an anonymous, in 569. See (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 378–381, 397).

40 Pasquale Testini proposed to identify Bishop Ursus' burial with a tomb in front of the monument of Sts Eventius and Alexander [Fig. 1, burial t7], due to the highly symbolic positioning and the strong link with the early-5th-century renewal: see (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 397; Testini 1969, 731).

41 For the content of Innocent I's letter, cf. note 19. The later *Malmesbury Itinerary* (mid 7th century) still attests to the importance of S. Alessandro for pilgrimage routes, possibly due to the misidentification of St Alexander with a 2nd-century pope. See (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 220–221).

(Yasin 2005, 442). These burials reached in different directions: they addressed both the divine and the earthly beholders, stressing at the same time their belonging to the community and the importance of the deceased individuals (Bolaños-Herrera 2023, 72–73; Yasin 2005, 433, 441–451).

This tension between different, almost opposing poles can also be seen in the content of the epitaphs. As simple as they may seem, the funerary inscriptions in S. Alessandro reflect the general tendencies in Christian epigraphy (De Rubeis 2012, 254–265; Mazzoleni 2015). On the one hand, the standardisation of the form was intended to emphasise the communitarian aspect. On the other, the titles distinguished some deceased from others (Bolaños-Herrera 2023, 76; Salway 2015, 381–384). Moreover, new formulas hinted at the new belief system (Bolaños-Herrera 2023; Mazzoleni 2015, 453–458). This was the case, for instance, with the date of death: its precise recording was meant to attest to the 'second birth' of the deceased, who was beginning a new life in the afterworld (Mazzoleni 2015, 458).

To sum up, the evidence of the burials testifies to the complex network that lay under S. Alessandro. The presence of the deceased in this communal space emphasized Christian affiliation and strengthed the sense of community with the living. This was further demonstrated by the shared elements of the inscriptions, which followed formulae that expressed the beliefs inherent to their religion. At the same time, the location of the burials and the identification of some of the deceased with their titles set them apart within the community. Once again, only wealthier donors could afford to get close to the main cores of the shrine – even in positions otherwise inaccessible to the laity. This was intended to ensure that they would have access to the martyrs' intercession in the heavenly world, while preserving the memory of their status in the earthly one.

3 Furnishing the Shrine: The Donation of Objects and the Water Newton Treasure

The monumental arrangement of a shrine was the essential skeleton that shaped the sacred space and enclosed the holy sites. But this reality was complemented by a now lost combination of more perishable and movable materials, crucial for understanding the appearance, perception, and use of these spaces[42].

These elements were of paramount importance in Late Antiquity, as evidenced by church inventories and donations (Caseau 2007). One key piece of evidence in this regard is the *Liber Pontificalis* (The Book of Pontiffs)[43], a collection of popes' lives and deeds from St Peter onwards, probably compiled in the 6th century from earlier documents (Davis 2010, xlv-xlvii). Beginning with Constantine, whose donations stand out for their

42 For some insights on the issue, see (Ari 2024, 170–183; Bacci 2021; Blaauw and Doležalová 2019; Caseau 2007; Ivanovici 2016, 169–178; Sena Chiesa 2008; Yasin 2012, 953–958) with further bibliography.

43 English translation and commentary (Davis 2010). Latin edition and commentary (Duchesne 1886–1957).

magnitude[44], it records the donations made to churches by rulers and popes, with lists of objects, furnishings, and properties for their economic support (Davis 2010, xxxviii-xli, 30–31, 33–40, 42–45; Geertman 2004, 133, 174). Although their comparison with the little surviving material evidence is not always straightforward[45], it is still possible to appreciate how the head of the Roman Empire and the papacy invested significantly in movable objects and precious furnishings (Leader-Newby 2004, 62–66; Janes 1998; Pietri 1978). Some recur quite frequently: the *vasa sacra* (sacred vessels) and other items needed for the liturgy, lighting equipment, and decorations – especially furniture sheathing and votive offerings[46]. Furthermore, these objects are almost always made of gold, silver, and bronze, highlighting their economic and symbolic value (Leader-Newby 2004, 109–110; Leader-Newby 2018, 241–246; Mundell Mango 1992; Palladino 2022, 125–131).

An example of such a donation is that of Pope Boniface I (p. 418–422) to the oratory of St Felicity, which can be related to Bishop Ursus' renovation of S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana. Indeed, it is almost contemporary and was also intended for a funerary church with martyrs' graves[47].

> *patenam argenteam, pens.Iib. XX;*
> *scyphum argenteum, pens. Iib. X;*
> *amam argenteam, pens. Iib. XIII;*
> *calices minores II, pens. sing. Iib. IIII;*
> *coronas argenteas III, pens.. sing. Iib. XV.*
>
> a silver paten weighing 20 lb;
> a silver *scyphus* weighing 10 lb;
> a silver *ama* weighing 13 lb;
> 2 smaller <silver> chalices each weighing 4 lb;
> 3 silver crowns each weighing 15 lb[48]

44 Davis suggested that Constantine's endowments were more likely collection of donations from the entire Constantinian dynasty: see (Davis 2010, xxviii-xxx, 4–26); cf. (Ballardini 2014, 263).

45 On the role of inventories and donation lists as evidence of church paraphernalia and furnishings, see (Caseau 2007).

46 The *vasa sacra* (sacred vessels) included the chalice and the paten, respectively for the holy wine and bread. The *vasa non-sacra* (non-sacred vessels) included a wider range of items, such as ewers, kraters, spoons, strainers, bowls, and censers. Both these types were considered to be liturgical utensils, and therefore necessary for the performance of the main ritual and mysteries of Christianity. However, only the *vasa sacra* were deemed sacred because of their direct contact with the holy bread and wine during and after consecration. See (Elbern 1979; Leader-Newby 2018, 241–246; Mundell Mango 1990, 246; Sena Chiesa 2008). For their appearance within the *Liber Pontificalis*, see (Ballardini 2014, 263; Davis 2010, xxviii-xxx, xxxviii-xli, 4–26, 30–31, 33–40, 42–45; Geertman 2004, 133, 174).

47 The oratory housed the martyrs Felicity and Silvester's tombs, (Davis 2010, 30).

48 For the English translation, see (Davis 2010, 30); for the Latin transcription see (Duchesne 1886–1957, vol. I, 227–229).

Fig. 12. The Water Newton Treasure, silver, gilding, gold, second half of the 4th century CE, British Museum, London (call nos. 1975, 1002.1-27). From The British Museum Images. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Boniface provided the oratory with the necessary equipment for its ritual functioning and decoration: the paten for the holy bread, the chalices for the sacred wine, the *scyphus* (a larger vessel) and *ama* (an ewer) for the preparation of the wine, and the crowns, which were probably votive offerings or lamps to be hung over the martyrs' burials and their altar[49].

Emperors and popes did not have the exclusive right to bestow gifts on churches. As with buildings, monuments, and burials, members of the elite could also showcase their piety by donating properties, furnishings, and precious objects to churches and shrines[50]. A particularly striking example comes from the area around Rome. It is the so-called *Charta Cornutiana* (The Donation for the Cornuta Church), which records the endowment of a rural church near Tivoli (Rome) by the *magister utrisque militae* (general of infantry and cavalry) Flavius Valila in 471[51]. His high position allowed the Goth official to donate to the church a rich array of silver vessels, bronze lighting fixtures, costly textiles such as altar cloths and curtains, and valuable liturgical books (Geertman 2011). Flavius Valila's donation shows the extent to which the patronage of an elite member could shape the interior of a church, associating himself – and his memory – with almost all the furnishing and liturgical implements.

Few of these precious objects remain today due to their vulnerability to theft, reuse, and fragility. Those that survived were usually hidden and never recovered, or buried as grave goods. The following paragraphs will focus on the earliest known Christian liturgical and votive hoard: the Water Newton Treasure [Fig. 12].

The Water Newton Treasure is a group of twenty-seven objects found in 1975 by a metal detectorist near the site of the Roman town of Durobrivae, about halfway between

49 For the identification of *amae*, *scyphi* and crowns, see (Davis 2010, 106–107, 111–112, 125; Caseau 2007, 556–557; Geertman 2004, 44–73). For crowns in Christianity as symbols and glorification of martyrdom, see (De Rubeis 2012, 266–267).

50 (Leader-Newby 2004, 62–66; Janes 1998; Pietri 1978). Though from a later period, examples of elite members sponsoring ecclesiastical implements and church decoration can be seen in some 6th- and 7th-century treasures from Syria and Anatolia. Cf. (Ari 2024, 163–170; Boyd 1992; Mango 1992; Mundell Mango 1986, 3–6, 8–13; Ševčenko 1992).

51 For the Latin transcription of the document, see (Duchesne 1886–1957, vol. I, CXLVI-CXLVIII). For a commentary on the donation of movable objects to the church, see (Geertman 2011).

York and London (Painter 1977, 8–9). It was acquired by the British Museum shortly afterwards and underwent a cleaning and conservation process. All the items are made of silver, with the exception of a golden disc, and have been identified as liturgical vessels and votive offerings[52]. Albeit with caution, we can recognise some of those mentioned within the written sources: a large dish (paten?), a cantharus chalice, two ewers, three bowls (chalices?), a hanging bowl, and a strainer [Fig. 12]. The group is completed by seventeen silver plaques and the golden disc, all votive offerings [Figs. 12; 14–16][53]. The objects in the hoard were probably made between the second half of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th[54] and were hidden away in the early decades of the 5th century, probably by their owners[55]. Although other silver hoards from this and earlier periods survive, only Water Newton has been definitively identified as a church treasure. The widespread presence of Chi-Rho (a combination of the Greek initials for 'Christ') is a clear mark of Christian affiliation [Fig. 13–16]. Nevertheless, it does not imply ecclesiastical ownership or religious use, as such symbols were also used on non-religious objects (Engemann 1972; Leader-Newby 2018, 246–250). Dedicatory inscriptions on two bowls and a plaque are the chief evidence of the liturgical and votive functions of these objects (Painter 1999) [Figs. 13–15].

These inscriptions are the 'counterparts' of monumental dedications and epitaphs. Displayed and used within the shrine, objects similar to those from Water Newton would have been in direct contact with the monuments and burials in S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana. Indeed, while a direct association must be ruled out due to geographical distance, the close chronology and the partial uniformity of silver production in the Roman Empire allow for a juxtaposition[56]. Together they can help us to form a more complete – yet still partial – image of what an early-5th-century shrine would have looked like. Within this context, the evidence of the dedicatory inscriptions highlights the layers of means by which donors could approach the sacred space of the basilica and the holy tombs of the martyrs.

3.1 Being Part of the Ritual: Offering the Liturgical Vessels

Two of the three bowls in the Water Newton Treasure are marked by dedications [Figs. 13–14]. These plain vessels have no decoration other than the inscription running just below the

52 On the identification of these objects as liturgical vessels, see (Painter 1999).

53 For a detailed description of each object, see (Painter 2006, 212–222, nos. 196–222); see also the catalogue entries (call nos. 1975, 1002.1–27) in (British Museum Online Collection, n.d.).

54 The dating is mostly based on the comparison of the shape of the vessels with other treasures, such as the Hoxne Treasure (buried in 400–450), and the analysis of the inscriptions, see (Hobbs and Jackson 2010, 134; Painter 1999, 3; Painter 2006, 210–211).

55 This seems to be evidenced by the careful concealment of the objects, most of which were in usable condition when buried: see (Painter 1977, 20–21; Painter 2006, 210).

56 On the uniformity and circulation of silver production within the Late Roman Empire, see (Baratte 1997; Baratte 2012; Baratte and Painter 1989, 255–256; Huges, Lang, La Niece and Oddy 1989; Leader-Newby 2018, 240–241; Sena Chiesa 2008, 553).

Fig. 13. The Bowl with Innocentia and Viventia's dedication, Water Newton Treasure, silver, second half or late 4th century CE, British Museum, London (call no. 1975,1002.4). From The British Museum Images. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 14. The Bowl with Publianus' dedication and one of the Chi-Rho inscribed plaques, Water Newton Treasure, partially gilded silver, second half or late 4th century CE, British Museum, London (call nos. 1975, 1002.5; 1975, 1002.18). From The British Museum Images. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

rim. They were probably used for liquids, possibly wine or water, but their exact function cannot be ascertained[57]. Both mention their donors and the act of offering the vessel.

One is by two women, Innocentia and Viventia, who chose a formula based on the tradition of votive offerings in Antiquity [Fig. 13][58].

> *((alpha Chi-Rho omega)) Innocentia et Viventia ?lib[enter dede]runt*
> Innocentia and Viventia gave [this] willingly[59]

The quality of the inscription is particularly high, particularly in the detail of the elaborate Chi-Rho that marks its beginning and end (Painter 1977, 14–15; Painter 2006, 214) [Fig. 13].

57 In general, they can be expected to have been involved in the main rituals of the community, such as the preparation and distribution of wine for the Eucharist or the sprinkling/pouring of water during baptism, see (Painter 1999, 15–16).

58 On Innocentia and Viventia's vessel (call no. 1975,1002.4), see (Painter 1977, 13–15 no. 8; Painter 2006, 214 no. 219); the catalogue entry in (British Museum Online Collection, n.d.). On the votive formulas in Antiquity, cf. (Baratte 1992, 119; Birkle 2013, 62–82; Tomlin 2018, 380; Painter 1999, 20 n. 6; Szasbó 2016) with further bibliography.

59 Transcription and translation from (Tomlin 2018, 380 no. 12.95); see also (Painter 1977, 15–16, no. 9; Painter 1999, 10–11; Painter 2006, 214 no. 199).

The other vessel was offered by a man called Publianus [Fig. 14][60]. In contrast to Innocentia and Viventia, he preferred a more overtly Christian and elaborate formula – a dactylic hexameter (Painter 1977, 15; Painter 1999, 11–19). He also added his name to the bottom of the vessel, separating it from the dedication, which reads:

> *sanctum altare tuum ((alpha Chi-Rho omega)) D((alpha Chi-Rho omega))omine, subnixus honoro*
> prostrating myself, o Lord, I honour your sacred sanctuary[61]

Publianus' inscription was crucial to Kenneth S. Painter's argument for the liturgical character of the treasure's vessels. Indeed, its explicit mention of honouring the 'sacred sanctuary of the Lord' echoes some rituals mentioned in the writings of Ambrose of Milan (bp. 374–397)[62]. While humbling by 'prostrating' himself and writing his name in an invisible position, Publianus still displayed his piety and status by offering a costly silver vessel (weighing 662.7 gr in fragments) (Painter 1977, 15; Painter 1988, 98–99; Painter 1999, 2; Painter 2006, 218) [Fig. 14].

The tradition of offering expensive vessels and objects was rooted in Roman polytheism. Temples throughout the Roman Empire had a long tradition of receiving gifts from public authorities and private citizens[63]. Vessels were included in these highly varied collections of valuable items[64]. Written and material sources testify to their character as gifts, which could be bequeathed or made specifically for the temple treasury. The name of the donor, recorded directly on the object or in a monumental inscription, ensured that their memory would be associated with the gift in the eyes of the community and the divine addressee[65].

The two inscribed vessels from Water Newton share the same purpose as their polytheistic predecessors: to link the memory of the donors to the sacred space and the divine presence through their names. Franz Alto Bauer, in his work *Gabe und Person* (Gift and Person), has clearly demonstrated how the dynamics of gifting in Late Antiquity was closely related both to the personal aura of the giver and to the creation of a bond between donor and recipient that could transcend human interactions and involve the supernatural (Bauer

60 On Publianus' vessel (call no. 1975,1002.5), see (Painter 1977, 15–16 no. 9; Painter 2006, 215 no. 200); the catalogue entry in (British Museum Online Collection, n.d.).

61 Transcription and translation from (Tomlin 2018, 380–381, no. 12.96).

62 In particular, Ambrose of Milan's *De sacramentis* (4.2.7) and *De mysteriis* (8.43): see (Painter 1999, 13–19: 14–16). See also (Spier 2007, 200–201).

63 On temple interiors and treasures, see (Baratte 1992; Baratte 1996; Leader-Newby 2004, 72–77; Künzl 1997; Oliver 1977, 148–175; Painter 1997, 97; Von Hesberg 2015), with further bibliography.

64 Temple treasures included paintings, sculptures, furniture, jewellery, garments, coins, vessels, and tools. Almost any valuable object could be offered to a deity and thus consecrated, as both written and archaeological attest, see (Baratte 1992, 116; Baratte 1996, 25–26; Baratte and Painter 1989). For an example of votive bowls in the Notre-Dame d'Alleçon Treasure (3rd century CE), see (Baratte and Painter 1989, 104–105 nos. 34–35).

65 (Baratte 1992, 117–119). For instance, the thirty-three silver spoons from the Thetford Treasure (350–400 CE), (Johns and Potter 1983, 34–52); cf. the catalogue entries (call nos. 1981,0201.50–82) in (British Museum Online Collection, n.d.).

2009, 59–65). By offering liturgical vessels, donors such as Publianus, Viventia, and Innocentia sought to have their names, identities, and personal presence directly integrated into the rituals performed at the altar – and thus to benefit from the salvific encounter with the divine (Bauer 2009, 59–62; Magnani 2009, 1021–1031). Similar to monumental dedications and burials *ad altare* (near the altar), this allowed the donor to be permanently present at the liturgy and in close contact with the holy matter – in the case of the vessels, this could have been the consecrated wine[66]. It was a position that was inaccessible to most of the congregation, and which donors – apart from the priests – could never experience in their physical presence (Blaauw 2024, 24; Caseau 2002, 140–143; Caseau 2012; Heid 2024, 85–93; Magnani 2009, 1027–1029). Hence, the vessels became the privileged mediators of the donors' presence, memory, prayers, and wishes, ensuring their connection with God through the liturgy, even after their death (Ari 2024, 163–167: 167).

Moreover, by being used for communal rituals, these objects would have advertised the donors' aspirations to the whole community[67]. Not only the clergy, who deal directly with the objects, but also the congregation gathered for the liturgy would have appreciated the memory and presence of the donors through their names (Ari 2024, 168–169). This feature also links them to monumental and funerary inscriptions, such as those in S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana.

Liturgical vessels were essential for the functioning of a sacred space. Even if their exact shapes cannot be reconstructed, S. Alessandro certainly had utensils for the ritual celebrations in its basilica and in the cultic rooms. We can imagine that some of them were given to the shrine by private donors, as in the case of the Water Newton bowls, or even by the bishop himself, as Boniface I did with the oratory of St Felicity.

3.2 Evoking the Divine Power: The Votive Plaques

The third inscription in the Water Newton Treasure is on a votive offering [Fig. 15][68]. It is one of seventeen silver plaques, all triangular and with linear relief decoration, nine of which are enriched by a Chi-Rho [Figs. 14–16][69]. Though fragmentary, it is among the largest. The embossed inscription unfolds in two lines on the upper side. It reads:

> *amcilla votum quo[d] / promisit conplevit*
> [His] handmaid has paid the vow that she promised[70]

66 (Bauer 2009, 59; Magnani 2009, 1031). Cf. the 6th-century examples in the Sion Treasure, (Ari 2024, 163, 169–170).

67 Cf. the example of the 6th-century CE Sion Treasure, (Ari 2024, 170–183).

68 On Amcilla's plaque (call no. 1975,1002.12), see (Painter 1977, 17–18 no.12; Painter 2006, 219–220, no. 207); the catalogue entry in (British Museum Online Collection, n.d.).

69 On the Water Newton plaques and the related golden disc (call nos. 1975, 1002.10–27), see (Painter 1977, 16–19 nos. 10–28; Painter 2006, 218–222, nos. 205–222); the catalogue entries in (British Museum Online Collection n.d.).

70 Transcription and translation from (Tomlin 2018, 379 no. 12.94); see also (Painter 2006, 218, 220 no. 207).

"Amcilla" has alternatively been interpreted as the donor's name or the misspelt word *ancilla* (handmaid), which would echo Mary's humbling self-definition in the Annunciation (Tomlin 2018, 379 no. 12.94; Painter 2006, 218, 220 no. 207) [Fig. 15]. The chosen formula secured the identification of this and all the analogous plaques from Water Newton as votive offerings (Painter 2006, 219–220, no. 207).

Fig. 15. The Amcilla's votive plaque, Water Newton Treasure, silver, second half or late 4th century CE, British Museum, London, (call no. 1975, 1002.12).
From The British Museum Images
© The Trustees of the British Museum.

Their resemblance to Roman polytheistic examples is further evidence. Were it not for the Chi-Rho, Amcilla's plaque would have been perfectly suited to the shrine of a Roman goddess or god. Indeed, an almost identical formula has been noted by Charles Thomas on a bronze plaque dedicated to Nudens Mars, dated between the second half of the 3rd and the late 4th century CE[71]. In addition, polytheistic votive plaques found throughout the former Roman Empire have a form comparable to the Water Newton ones (Baratte 1992, 114, 119–120; Baratte 1996, 24–25; Birkle 2013; Jackson 2018b; Künzl 1997, 66–68), as illustrated for instance by the Stony Stratford Treasure (second half of the 3rd–4th century CE) (Jackson 2018a, 75–97) [Fig. 17]. Again, this shows how Christianity adapted earlier traditions to its new ideals and meanings. The images and names of the gods were replaced by the Chi-Rho symbol, representing Christ and God. However, the shape and decoration – which can be identified as leaves[72] – were retained [Figs. 14–17]. Roman polytheistic examples followed the use of palm branches in Oriental cults or tree worship in Celtic religions by adopting the leaf shape (Birkle 2013, 166–168, 176–184; Künzl 1997, 66–68; Painter 2006, 218). It gained a new association with martyrdom in Christianity through the symbolic link with victory in Roman games. Like the victorious athlete or charioteer in his competition, the martyr won eternal life over death. Thus, the palm leaf and the triumphal crown – symbols of victory in the games – became signs of the 'champion of faith' (Croci 2017; De Rubeis 2012, 266–267; Watts 1991, 151). This was further strengthened by the partial attribution to martyrs of the traditional hallmarks of ancient heroes

71 (Thomas 1981, 117). For the formulas on Roman polytheistic ex-votos, see (Szasbó 2016) with further bibliography.
The plaque by Pectilius was found in Lydney Park (Gloucestershire, UK) around 1826 and is now part of the private collection of Lord Bledisloe. The inscription reads:
Pectillus |votum quod |promissit |deo Nudente | M(arti) dedit
Pectillus gave the god Nudens Mars the votive offering which he had promised
Transcription, translation and overview from the entry (call no. RIB 307) in (Roman Inscriptions of Britain n.d.).

72 They have also been interpreted as feathers: see (Birkle 2013, 166–168; Painter 2006, 218).

Fig. 16. One of the Chi-Rho inscribed votive plaques and its related golden disc, Water Newton Treasure, partially gilded silver, gold, second half or late 4th century CE, British Museum, London, (call nos. 1975, 1002.10–11). From The British Museum Images. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

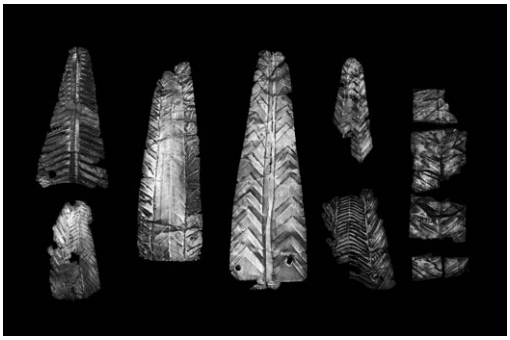

Fig. 17. Votive plaques, Stony Stratford Treasure, silver, second half of the 3rd–4th century, British Museum, London, (call nos. OA.252.23, 14, 3, 16, 19, 21/22/58/59/69). From The British Museum Images. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

and their cult – seen as champions par excellence (Bauer 2009, 63–64; Bernier-Farella 2015). Charged with this new meaning, palm branches entered Christian cultic spaces and became suitable signs of the martyrs and God's triumph.

A shrine would have manifested the power of the divine addressee through the accumulation and display of votive offerings[73]. The Water Newton plaques are particularly significant in this context, as they date from a period when Christianity was still asserting its supremacy over other religious cults (Jackson 2018, 139; Thomas 1981, 121). In this perspective, votive offerings or ex-votos differed slightly from the liturgical implements, monuments, and burials seen so far. Although still relatively expensive, plaques were much cheaper than vessels or monuments and were therefore usually more numerous (Painter 1997, 98–99; Painter 2006, 219). The absence of direct involvement or prominent position within the shrine's ritual emphasised a more personal and, to some extent, intimate connection with the divine. Furthermore, the ex-votos referred more explicitly and specifically to an exchange with the supernatural (Painter 1999, 12; Ullucci 2018). Do-

73 (Baratte 1996, 31; Ullucci 2018, 282–301). The original display of Water Newton's plaques is not entirely clear, although some pinholes suggest that they could have been pinned or sewed to supports or hung from the ceiling [Fig. 16]: see (Painter 2006, 218). An idea can be gained from the techniques used for displaying ancient votive plaques in temples and shrines: cf. (Birkle 2013, 170–176; Salapata 2002, 26–31).

nors offered them after their request had been granted by the divine addressee (Ari 2024, 167–168; Baratte 1992, 119; Mundell Mango 1986, 5–6). Indeed, Amcilla 'fulfilled the vow that she promised' because God granted her appeal in the first place [Fig. 15].

This dynamic recalled that of sacrifice and also underscored the provision of liturgical objects, furnishings, and monuments (Palladino 2022, 124–125, 131; Ullucci 2018). However, the smaller dimensions and more affordable prices of votive plaques allowed less affluent donors and visitors to manifest their faith[74]. Often anonymous, these votive offerings served as powerful reminders of the divine power in the minds of contemporaries, as they provided tangible evidence of the numerous pleas that had been granted – even when nothing was explained about the donor or the request.

The original location of the Water Newton plaques is unknown, but it is possible to imagine that a shrine such as S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana would have been a suitable recipient. Indeed, there is evidence of ex-votos donations in Rome and the surrounding area[75]. Votive plaques could have been displayed in the cultic rooms of the martyrs' monuments to show the piety of visitors, whether they were members of the local community or pilgrims[76]. Their presence and gradual growth would have strengthened the sense of sacredness of the holy burials, completing the architecture and furnishings, and testifying to the growing community of believers (Bacci 2021, 16–17).

4 Conclusions: Approaching the Divine Between Memory and Presence

As Christian places of worship were progressively defined after Constantine's promotion of the new religion, their main sacred cores were monumentalised and gradually isolated (Blaauw 2016, 553–562; Blaauw 2024; Bowes 2011, 53–55; Liccardo 2005, 144–146; Sotinel 2005, 411–434; Yasin 2012, 937–947). Access to the altar – the centre of the sacred space – and the holy sites – such as martyr tombs – was restricted to specific occasions or to the clergy[77]. Nevertheless, it was there that the salvific encounter with the divine took

74 The existence of artisan workshops producing such votive items in series outside shrines has been proposed for both polytheistic and Christian environments. The devotee would have purchased the ex-voto and possibly personalised it with inscriptions before donating it to the shrine: see (Baratte 1992, 120; Baratte and Painter 1989, 104).

75 For the polytheistic evidence, 2nd-century CE leaf-shaped votive offerings were found at Vicarello on Lake Bracciano (north of Rome), originally thrown into a spring consecrated to Apollo (Baratte 1992, 119–120; Birkle 2013, vol. 1, 344–345 no. 73). A golden rectangular plaque with eyes and a cross was excavated in the 1940s at the site of the Old St. Peter's (Vatican). It dates from the 6th-7th century and attests to the survival of such a custom in later centuries: see (Silvan 2000, 173, 227). For later evidence of Christian votive plaques (mostly dating from the 6th-8th centuries), see (Jackson 2018b, 140–141; Mundell Mango 1986, 240–245).

76 The importance of S. Alessandro as a pilgrimage centre is attested by the *Malmesbury Itinerary*, a mid-7th-century CE pilgrimage 'guide', which mentions it as one of the few shrines still active and worth visiting outside the walls of Rome: see (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 220–221).

77 (Blaauw 2024, 24–26; Caseau 2002, 140–143; Caseau 2012). For the difference between sacred space and holy site, cf. (Bacci 2021).

place, mediated by the liturgy or by the presence of holy physical elements – the body of a saint or a consecrated natural feature. They therefore attracted the attention of believers who sought to get as close as possible. The multifaceted nature of Christian shrines was exploited through material donations to circumvent this prohibition. A case study juxtaposing an archaeological site with a liturgical and votive treasure has been analysed to highlight the different means used by donors.

S. Alessandro sulla Via Nomentana was a funerary shrine built around the burials of the martyrs Eventius, Alexander, and Theodul (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 202–413) [Fig. 1, burials t1 and t2]. Renovated and enlarged in the early 5th century, it consisted of three main spaces: two cultic rooms enclosing the martyrs' monuments and a basilica, where the liturgy was celebrated (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 322–361) [Fig. 1, basilica B-B1, rooms M-M1, T-T1]. The intervention, promoted by Ursus, Bishop of Nomentum, was intended to monumentalise the whole complex and, at the same time, to create the space for the subsequent burial of the faithful – possibly including the bishop himself – next to the sacred cores of the shrine. The bishop clearly marked his role as the main patron, by inscribing his name on at least one of the martyrs' monuments and on an architrave in the basilica (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 340–341, 358–360) [Figs. 4–6]. All the faithful who gathered for the rituals in the latter, or who approached to the monument to pray, would have encountered the bishop's name. Private donors could also contributed and aspired to have their name associated with key monuments, such as Delicatus who sponsored the transenna on the monument to Sts Alexander and Eventius, which Ursus later inscribed with his name and title (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 340–341) [Figs. 4–5].

Another way for donors to secure a prominent position was to be interred near the altar (*ad altare*) or the martyrs' tomb (*ad sanctos*) after their death (Duval 1988; Yasin 2005). In this state, their bodies would have enjoyed the liturgy and the proximity of the holy remains of the martyrs, with a positive effect on their souls in the afterlife (Duval 1988, 171–193; Yasin 2005, 433).

Moreover, according to Christian belief, they would enjoy a privileged place at the martyrs' side or in the sacred space when bodies and souls were reunited at the end of time (Duval 1988, 194–202). In S. Alessandro this is evidenced by the burials which have been found clustered around the altar area and the martyrs' sepulchres[78]. The best locations, in terms of prominence and proximity, were occupied by members of the elite – both religious and lay [Fig. 8][79]. The simple and repetitive formulae of their epitaphs underscored their affiliation with the community and their adherence to the Christian faith (Mazzoleni 2015, 453–460; Yasin 2005, 441–446); conversely, the explicit mention of their titles distinguished them by showcasing their status (Yasin 2005, 446–451) [Figs. 7, 9–11].

A Christian shrine was not an 'empty' building, with only fixed furnishings and monuments. An array of objects, decorations, and movable furniture contributed to its appearance and functioning. Rarely preserved, what is now lost can be gleaned from the writ-

78 The early-5th-century shrine was used as a burial site with additions and later modifications until the late 6th century: see (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 362–379).

79 For the examples examined in the paper, see (Fiocchi Nicolai 2009, 356–357, 370–375).

ten sources. Lists of donations, such as those recorded in the *Liber Pontificalis* (the Book of Pontiffs) or the *Charta Cornutiana* (The Donation for the Cornuta Church), give an idea of what furnished these spaces in Late Antiquity[80]. Liturgical implements, lighting equipment, soft furnishings, votive objects, and precious sheathings are just some of the more recurrent items of wealth donated to the churches of Rome by emperors, popes, and aristocrats. Unfortunately, we do not have a similar list for S. Alessandro. But the examples of similar churches endowed by contemporary popes can give us an idea of what was considered necessary for a shrine – for instance, in the donation by Pope Boniface I (p. 418–422) to the funerary oratory of St Felicity (Davis 2010, 30; Duchesne 1886–1957, vol. I, 227–229).

The material counterpart to these now lost objects can be seen in the Water Newton Treasure, the earliest surviving Christian liturgical and votive hoard [Fig. 12][81]. It was hidden around the mid-5th century near Durobrivae, on the Roman road between London and York (Hobbs and Jackson 2010, 134; Painter 1977, 8–9, 20–21; Painter 2006, 210–211). It contains twenty-seven objects, including silver liturgical equipment, votive silver plaques, and a golden disc. Of these, two vessels and a plaque bear dedicatory inscriptions[82]. These are the material equivalents of all the objects in the lists, and allow us to see yet another 'route' by which donors might access the sacred. By donating liturgical vessels, donors associated themselves with the liturgy in a way that only priests could experience as physical persons (Ari 2024, 163, 169–170; Bauer 2009, 59–62; Magnani 2009, 1021–1031) [Figs. 13–14]. Their names and the objects they marked, came into contact with the sacred substance of the wine and bread consecrated in the Eucharistic liturgy (Ari 2024, 174–183). Finally, votive gifts such as the silver plaques and the golden disc were a much more affordable way of approaching the sacred (Painter 1997, 98–99; Painter 2006, 219) [Figs. 14–16]. Although not as prestigious as a monumental inscription, a burial *ad sanctos* or *ad altare*, or a liturgical vessel, ex-votos still enabled contact with the divine and left an imprint in the sacred environment. Votive plaques usually marked a more personal and intimate connection, testifying to a promise fulfilled between God and the donor, without necessarily recording its details (Ari 2024, 167–168; Baratte 1992, 119; Mundell Mango 1986, 5–6) – in most cases even the donor's name was omitted. Nevertheless, these small items were perceived as evidence of divine power which became all the more manifest when they accumulated near holy sites and ritual spaces[83].

The same fundamental ideas underpinned these diverse approaches. First, the 'sacrificial' dynamic, which established an exchange between the donor and the divine through

80 For the *Liber Pontificalis* see the transcription in (Duchesne 1886–1957) and translation in (Davis 2010). For a transcription of the *Charta Cornutiana*, see (Duchesne 1886–1957, vol. I, CXLVI-CXLVIII); for an analysis of donated objects (Geertman 2011).

81 (Painter 2006); catalogue entries (call nos. 1975, 1002.1–27) in (British Museum Online Collection, n.d.).

82 For the analysis of the vessels and the plaque, see (Painter 2006, 214–215, 219–220, nos. 199–200, 207); cf. the catalogue entries (call nos. 1975,1002.4, 1975,1002.5, 1975,1002.12) in (British Museum Online Collection, n.d.). For the transcription and translation of the inscriptions, see (Tomlin 2018, 379–381, nos. 12.94–12.96).

83 (Baratte 1996, 31; Ullucci 2018, 282–301). For Greek polytheistic examples, cf. (Salapata 2002).

the gift (Heid 2024, 209–210; Palladino 2022, 124–125; Ullucci 2018). Second, the belief that the gift carried a part of the donor's personal aura, possibly clarified by her/his name (Bauer 2009). Third, the belief that physical proximity to the sacred space and the holy sites would provide privileged access to the divine realm and its salvific power (Duval 1988, 133–202). From the largest monument and the most prominent tomb to the smallest ex-votos, these gifts and their placement served the same purpose: to bring the memory and presence of their donor as close as possible to the sacred.

The main difference between them lies in their material scale and expected benefit. Indeed, having one's name – or even one's body – placed in the shrine in a monumental and fixed way meant being present there, and ideally enjoying its salvific influence for eternity (Duval 1988, 171–193; Yasin 2005, 433). Similarly, but in a less permanent sense, having one's presence recorded on a liturgical vessel or the movable furnishings of the shrine had a somewhat less enduring effect; the precious materials and mobility of these items made them vulnerable to theft or destruction. Finally, the votive plaques and smaller ex-votos were considerably less 'powerful' because of their exclusion from the active functioning of the shrine and their frequent anonymity. Furthermore, these different shades of 'intensity' indicated differing levels of social visibility, distinguishing a patron such as Bishop Ursus, whose presence prominently marked the entire shrine, from an anonymous contributor of a nameless votive plaque, collected alongside others.

Examining these approaches to the shrine's cores has allowed us to appreciate the continuities and changes with earlier Roman polytheistic practices. Indeed, as Christianity increasingly permeated late Roman society, ancient attitudes to religious piety were adopted and imbued with new meanings. On a larger scale, the patronage of buildings and monuments continued the ancient practice of euergetism, following the gradual conversion of the Roman aristocracy (Lepelley 1998). However, the new Christian understanding of wealth and the inclusion of the bishopric among the aristocratic honours, conditioned and transformed this ancient practice (Hollman 2008; Janes 1998; Lepelley 1998, 21–22, 26–33). Similarly, the long-standing tradition of temple treasures was adapted to the new cultic space through church treasures (Baratte 1992; Leader-Newby 2004, 72–97, 109–110; Painter 1997, 96–102). Vessels and implements were adapted to the Christian liturgy, although both churches and temples accumulated precious offerings and gifts alongside more functional objects[84]. Ex-votos provide further evidence in this sense. This more 'popular' approach to the divine has shown a striking similarity between Roman polytheistic and Christian specimens, which only differed when the addressee was explicit – with the Roman goddess/god's name or image, or a Christian symbol, such as the Chi-Rho [Figs. 16–17]. Leaf-shaped votive plaques – such as those from Water Newton – may have originated in Western Asiatic and Celtic traditions, but were reinterpreted by Christianity (Jackson 2018b, 132–140; Painter 2006, 218). The leaf, reminiscent of a palm branch, became a sign of the martyrs' victory over death and God's triumph[85].

84 This included, for instance, the donation of coins, jewellery, clothing, works of art, and objects unrelated to cult practices. See (Baratte 1992; Baratte 1996; Caseau 2007; Jackson 2018b).

85 Cf. paragraph 3.2; (Croci 2017; De Rubeis 2012, 266–267; Watts 1991, 151).

The survey of an early-5th-century Christian shrine has revealed the composite layers of material culture interacting within it. From the architectural framework to the monuments to the furnishings, the whole complex had fixed, sacred points around which everything was shaped, including the use and perception of the space. Within this, the presence of donors has been highlighted by examining how they approached the sacred. Interestingly, they entered into a network of references and connections involving different materials and signs (Magnani 2009, 1021–1042). Thus, beyond the main exchange between the donors and God, implied by the gift, the clergy and the community visiting the shrine also interacted with their memory and presence.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning the other types of gifts not covered in this paper. These include more perishable materials, such as books, textiles, oil, and incense, not preserved or intended for consumption[86]. Likewise, the donation of properties is more difficult to define and reconstruct today, but landed estates were essential to the survival of a religious institution and were frequently recorded alongside precious utensils and furnishings[87]. All this should be understood as part of the endowment of shrines, completing the picture of this complex phenomenon. It would be beneficial if further research could be carried out in this comparative direction. This would allow a better reconstruction of this multifaceted reality and of the figures who dealt with it on different levels. Indeed, every trace left in the environment where people encountered the divine shaped it and was a message addressed to both a heavenly and an earthly audience.

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86 For books, see (Frazer 1992). For textiles, see (Ball 2018; Blaauw and Doležalová 2019; Leatherbury 2017; Geertman 2011, 603–611). For incense and other perishable materials, see (Ballardini 2014; Heid 2024, 214–215).

87 Cf. the examples from the *Liber Pontificalis* and the *Charta Cornutiana*, in (Davis 2010; De Francesco 1998).

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Bricks for the Gods: Archaeological Evidence for the Production of Neo-Babylonian Stamped Bricks in Rural Southern Iraq?

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1 Introduction

During the first exploratory season of the RuBab survey project[1] in Spring 2024 and the first official season in Spring 2025 several sites of this period were visited. Only the smallest sites are occupied during one or two periods, whereas at more substantial sites traces of settlement often start at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC or even reach back into the 3rd millennium BC. As the region was described as the *Heartland of Cities* by Adams, it is not surprising that several sites even provide evidence for the earlier periods.[2]

The evidence concerning potential brick production found during the fieldwork can be roughly incorporated into two big groups of sites. The first one includes such places which seemed to produce evidence in favor of a widespread habit of re-using ancient (sometimes inscribed) bricks for basalt production.[3] Secondly, it seems to be the case that at a few sites

1 Project RuBab is focusing on the 1st millennium BC (ca. 720–150 BC) in the rural landscape to the SE of Nippur until around the region of Bismaya/Adab. This research is part of the project No. 2022/45/P/HS3/03924 co-funded by the National Science Centre and the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 945339. Permission of work was kindly granted by Ali Shalgham, the director of the SBAH Baghdad.

2 See Adams 1981; see also Altaweel and Squitieri 2018. First survey work in the region was conducted by Raymond Dougherty in 1925–26 (Dougherty 1925–26). Recently in the region was conducted a modern broadband survey led by Nicolò Marchetti (Marchetti et al 2017; Idem. 2018; Idem 2020; Marchetti and Zaina 2020).

3 During a visit with the joint Durham/Al-Qadisiyah University team in February 2024 at Rammahiyah, a site lying about 21 km to the SSW of Diwaniyah, otherwise thought to be a Sasanian foundation, to my surprise a stamped fragment of a Nebuchadnezzar II brick was observed lying on the surface in a looters pit, in a region of the site containing much black colored, ashy deposits. Concerning artificial basalt production see Stone et al 1998. For the evidence at the Birs Nimrud Borsippa see Allinger-Csollich 1987; idem 1991; idem 1998; For material analysis at Borsippa see Becke 1987; Lukas 1987. In 2025 was found a nearly complete example of a Nebuchadnezzar II stamped brick which

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some stamped fragments are to be identified as kiln waste from actual primary brick production. This becomes also apparent as contemporary sherds were found on the surface of such mounds. Both types of evidence are included in this chapter while all the evidence assembled must be seen as preliminary, with further fieldwork expectedly adding additional evidence to better distinguish such sites.[4]

The main evidence presented here comes from an area of ca. 2 square kilometers which lies about 18–19 km to the southeast of Nippur.[5] It includes the mound of Tell el-Laham (probably ancient Larak)[6] and, just 2 km further towards northeast, Tell Abu Qubur, with an adjacent flat site or lower town, nowadays known as Tell Semeh. It seems possible to connect them to large scale building programs by this Babylonian king.[7]

2 The impact of looting on the archaeological evidence at Umm el-Hafriyat and Tell Abu Qubur

At Umm al-Hafriyat large-scale looting resulted in a nearly complete destruction of the surface of the two main mounds to the northwest and southeast (Fig. 1), but also at the smaller mounds lying to the Southwest are affected. Heavy looting by organized gangs was already reported by Robert McCormick Adams during his "Heartland of the Cities" survey in 1975.[8] With such an early date provided, it stands out as lying at the beginning of the modern development of looting gangs which went famous at the site of Isin well before the US invasion of 2003. Since then, further looting happened in the 1990ies and 2000s resulting in large sales on the antiquities market already by 2000, with the main bulk ending up in the collections of Cornell University.[9]

At Tell Abu Qubur and Tell el-Laham earlier looting occurred already during the time after the first Gulf War of the US against Saddam Hussein 1990–2003, the northeastern part of the mound seems to have been affected by the more recent wave of 2003–2010, ongoing to a smaller scale. Even nowadays, small scale looting still appears on a regular basis at all sites in this region.[10] The scale of looting made surface finds more likely in comparison to an undisturbed context. Regrettably, it is not possible to judge, from what level in the ground such finds derived.

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seemed to be bended by heat and characteristic bubbles on the lower side at Tell Abu Jāwan (Adams 1981: No. 985), a site with a main occupation from Parthian until Sasanian/Early Islamic times.

4 It should be also kept in mind that there could exist sites with both types of evidence.

5 Tell el-Laham lies ca. 18 km ESE of Nippur and Tell Abu Qubur 19 km in the same direction.

6 See Marchetti et al. 2018 with additional bibliography. Adams 1981, No. 1230–31.

7 See for example George 2004–05.

8 Adams 1981, 45 "thousands of pits".

9 203 of 257 texts published by Milano and Westenholz (2015: xi). Since a large part of these tablets has been repatriated by now, they should be nowadays stored at the Iraq Museum in Baghdad.

10 Remoteness was not protecting this site and now even a new asphalt street to Hawr Dalmaj passing through between Tell Abu-Qubur and Tell Semeh was finished in 2024.

Fig. 1: Drone image of the main mound of Umm al-Hafriyat from northwest.
Image taken by Ali Tubr al-Gburi during RuBab Spring Season 2025.

3 Archaeological evidence of rural brick production

Already Robert Koldewey during his excavations of Babylon 1899–1916 assumed that most part of the brick production had to happen outside of the city.[11] After a summary of earlier evidence at Umm al-Hafriyat (3.1), the cases of Tell Abu Qubur and Tell Semeh (3.2) and Tell el-Laham (3.3) are presented.

At the site of Umm al-Hafriyat the occurrence of fine clay (silt particles), offered by ancient remains of a meandering Tigris, might be the reason for a preference of the clay from this region over other sources. Probably the quality of the source material also distinguishes Tell el-Laham and its surroundings as ideal places for brick production.

3.1 Umm al-Hafriyat as a potential model site for industrial brick production?

To find out, if the situation is comparable to the nearby site of Umm al-Hafriyat (Fig. 1), ca. 5.5 km to the northeast, where McGuire Gibson documented in a preliminary report multiple brick kilns[12] with fragments of Ur III bricks supposedly destined for Nippur, more on-site research is needed at Tell Abu Qubur including Tell Semeh and Tell el-Laham.[13] At a later visit Gibson noted more than 400 kilns, several lined-up with canals, one of them

11 Koldewey 1925.

12 Gibson 1977–78.

13 For several such bricks found *in situ* at Nippur see McCown and Haines 1978; Schneider 2018a; idem 2018b; idem 2023a; to the archaeology of Nippur during the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid period of Nippur see Schneider 2020, 116–117; idem 2022a; idem 2022b; idem 2023b; idem 2024.

Fig. 2: Below: Melted fragment (21,5 x 14 x 7 cm) of Nebuchadnezzar II brick (6 lines preserved of a 7 line inscription). Above left: section (green-black-green) of 7 cm height; above right: back side with reed mat impressions visible. Found on surface at Tell Abu Qubur. RuBab Survey project. B. Schneider.

described as belonging to the Euphrates.[14] Observations within the current RuBab survey rather provide a later date for the indicated canal lines but earlier versions cannot be excluded.[15] This is also indicated by the existence of a small mound dating into Seleucid period in the direct neighborhood.

3.2 Tell Abu Qubur and Tell Semeh as centers of brick production or secondary use?

During the ongoing RuBab Survey work, at the end of the first exploratory survey campaign of project RuBab in March 2024, material evidence of stamped bricks was discovered at Tell Abu-Qubur (19 km ESE of Nippur, 105 km SE of Babylon).[16] The fragments including several "kiln wasters" are bearing the standard inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II (7 lines) as provider of Esangil and Ezida (Fig. 2). They were found lying on the surface, without being recognized by the looters which were heavily pillaging the site (see above section 2). Despite their disturbed context, the frequent occurrence of fragments of kiln wasters including overfired bricks and fragments suggested a bigger scale of brick production at least at the northeastern part of Tell Abu Qubur. Just a few hundred meters to the east at Tell Semeh the survey work led by Nicolò Marchetti could document 6 bricks of Nebuchadnezzar II without further specifying the type of inscription.[17] Contrary to this evidence, more recent work at Tell Abu Qubur showed that the scatter of stamped bricks, slag and basalt is concentrated within a corridor of about 90 m width and within the borders of a canal coming from northwest and running in nearly straight line farther to the SE (Fig. 3). The date of use during Parthian and Sasanian times can be approximated by the periods of occupation of the sites it bypassed towards the northwest of Tell Abu Qubur, coming down from Tell Abu Jāwan[18] 18 km distant at the northwest edge

14 Gibson 1995–96, 72. Concerning recognition of ancient channels see Jotheri 2017; concerning levee based irrigation see Wilkinson and Jotheri 2021.

15 Ibid. 71 (Figure).

16 This mound is called Abu Qabr on American survey maps of the first half of the 20th century AD.

17 Marchetti et al 2018. The 1st millennium BC material of this survey project still awaits its final publication.

18 Adams 1981, No. 985. Schneider forthcoming. It is the same canal which bypasses Tell Zibliyat (Adams 1981, No. 700), 21 km further to the NW of Tell Abu Jāwan. Concerning an identification of the former with Zawabi see Adams 1981; Simpson 2022.

Fig. 3: Aerial view with part of Tell Abu Qubur on the left and Tell el-Laham on the right side. Drone image of from Northwest. Image taken by Ali Al-Guburi during RuBab Spring Season 2025.

of the RuBab Survey area. This is a branch of the so-called Shatt en-Nīl canal which was dug sometime in the mid of the 1st millennium AD, using a pre-existing levee and therefore likely following an earlier canal line.[19] It would be no surprise to find out that this comprises a branch of the *nār kabāri* (Akk. "the great canal"), mentioned in cuneiform texts and the

19 On satellite imagery it is visible as a levee running nearly parallel to a more Northeastern branch which reaches Adab and then is lost, it probably rejoins the main line farther to the Southeast nearby Tell Jidr. The channel through Nippur with the same modern designation, rather another side branch

Bible.[20] As this canal could have earlier origins, more work is needed to exclude actual brick production both at Tell Abu Qubur and Tell Semeh during Neo-Babylonian times.

3.3 Tell el-Laham (Larak?)

Tell el-Laham (Arabic for "meat mound") was already known as a source for Ashurbanipal Ekur bricks by locals, when Langdon was visiting the nearby village of ʻAfak in the early 1920ies.[21] Despite of the direction provided by the finders as lying to the northeast of ʻAfak, Langdon concluded wrongly, that the brick must have derived from a site called by him "Tell Dulayhim", nowadays known as Tell Dlehim to the Southeast of ʻAfak. This site probably contains the remains of ancient Tummal, as recently suggested by Nicolo Marchetti and later also by Abbas Alizadeh who visited the site in 2019 and later during preparations for excavation in 2021.[22] As this site experienced nearly continuous occupation from the second half of the 3rd millennium BC onwards until the 1st millennium AD, it is a more likely site for actual brick production. Furthermore, the probability of an identification of Tell el-Laham with ancient Larak could even provide the basis for a local tradition of brick making.[23]

4 Some considerations concerning the date of the Nebuchadnezzar II brick stamps produced

While surveying Tell Abu Qubur in 2024 and 2025 only 7-line standard stamp inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar II could be identified with certainty.[24] It is interesting to note, that at Tulul al-Baqarat (about 40 km to the northeast), only 3-line standard inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar II were found.[25] From there, additional evidence of a scribe training the monumental archaic writing of Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnez-

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of the same, was kept in use through all periods of occupation (Altaweel et al. 2019, 13–19), and therefore at least until the Sasanian/Early Islamic period.

20 Zadok 1978; Zadok 1985; Zadok 2015.

21 Langdon 1924. Furthermore, two stamped bricks with an inscription of Urnamma were reported by Marchetti et al. 2017, 71. As it was reported that they provided no further evidence for the identification of this site, it is possible that also these bricks bore a standard inscription often encountered at Nippur (Ibid. 70).

22 Alizadeh 2019–20, 98. Dlehim somehow always confused Western researchers, as it was also constantly mixed with Tell Drehem, ancient Puzriš-Dagan all over the 20th century. The latter produced thousands of administrative tablets from an official administration of a distribution center delivering animals destined for sacrifice at the sanctuaries of Nippur around the beginning of the 20th century BC.

23 Although, this site was stated to be situated on the "old Tigris" in inscriptions from the 1st millennium BC and it needs to be geomorphologically, if the river bars to the NE of this site could provide evidence for such an identification. See also the remarks concerning an identification with the *nār kabāri* at the nearby site of Tell Abu-Qubur.

24 Concerning such inscriptions see Berger 1973; Da Riva 2008; Novotny and Weiershäuser 2024.

25 Devecchi 2016, 135–142; Lippolis and Viano 2016.

Fig. 4: Aerial view with part of Tell Abu Qubur on the left and Tell el-Laham on the right side. Drone image of from northwest. Image taken by Ali Tubr al-Gburi during RuBab Spring Season 2025.

zar II, comparable to the brick inscriptions probably points towards a specialist, trained for producing such bricks from this site. It remains to being proved if this could also be an indicator of a relatively early production date for the bricks of Nebuchadnezzar II.

According to Robert Koldewey, the excavator of Babylon, stamps with a six-line inscription are the earliest,[26] recently it was also independently stated by Sass and Marzahn, that such stamps belong to the earlier bricks produced.[27] Already Berger suggested that six-line inscriptions belong relatively to the earlier productions under Nebuchadnezzar II.[28] Hopefully, renewed excavations at Babylon could bring new light into this question.

5 Secondary Aramaic stamps on the bricks from Babylon:

The Aramaic brick stamps from Babylon are clearly of a secondary character added to the main inscription provided by the kings stamp. Although it was suggested by Benjamin Sass and Joachim Marzahn that they could serve to designate to which works they should

26 Koldewey 1925, 75. "In der Südostecke des Kasr kommen die ältesten Ziegelstempel Nebukadnezars vor. … ES sind sechszeilige, deren Legende mit „bin ich" (anaku) endigt (Abb. 48, 51)."

27 Sass and Marzahn 2010. See also Berger 1973, 22–23 (based on Koldewey's excavations). In contrast Devecchi (2016, 137) and before her Da Riva (2008, 37) are more skeptical about establishing a relative sequence of such stamps as suggested by Berger.

28 Berger 1973: 22.

be dispatched, it is suggested here, that the main reason for these stamps is to document the provenance of a certain lot of bricks. This might have another administrative purpose but in my opinion it could serve also as another measurement of quality control and would keep the producer liable to its product.

5.1 Some hints concerning the provenance from the Aramaic stamps on Neo-Babylonian bricks from Babylon?

An Aramaic stamped inscription on a Nebuchadnezzar II brick (stamped 3-line inscription) of a certain Zabina (Aram. *zbn')* might help here to get some connection to the extensive building program of this king in Babylon.[29]

A site called Bit Zabin/I (1 x Zabî) is mentioned in at least 19 documents of the Murashû archive of the later half of the 5th century BC. It was situated on the Kutha canal, which began at Kutha, and continued downwards slightly West of Nippur until Uruk.

A certain Zabin, the šaknu of the haṭru of the sēpirus (meaning the alphabet scribes writing on parchment scrolls, hence not preserved) of the troops, was responsible for the call-up of military members, to be assembled at Uruk during the reign of Artaxerxes I. the šaknu of the haṭru of the sēpirus of the troops, in the Gadal-Yama letter.

But all of these were not written with an ending Aleph ʿ as in the case of the stamp on the bricks of Nebuchadnezzar. Within the attested personal names, only once a patronym is written as Zabinâ/î in texts from the Gallābu/Barbers archive from Ur during the reign of Artaxerxes II (404–359/8 BC, texts from y 6 until y 40 = 398–364 BC).

Unlike most of the personal names Zabinu (24 individuals) and Zabunu (12 individuals), as suggested by Sass, the Zabinâ canal was written with ending aleph, like on the brick in Babylon. This canal, so far, is known only as specification of a single town, ^{URU}šá Amurru-šarru-usur, which is situated at the Zabinâ canal. It could be a hint towards a connection with the region towards the southeast of Nippur.

5.2 Later evidence in the Nippur region connected to bricks from Babylon:

According to the latest Aramaic stamp inscription, probably 5th century ductus of Aramaic, on a single brick from Babylon, with an inscription *mršw* Murashû, the production could come from a certain town called Bīt-Murashû, attested in at least three documents of the Murashû archive. Its connection to the family of the same name is not sure, but it would be as likely that the origin of the family-name could be searched in this toponym. This Bīt -Murashû belongs to the estate of the Crown prince.

One more possible comparison exists with *zazzaku* attested in the secondary brick stamps from Babylon written in Aramaic. Although *zazzaku* as a title, designating a high dignitary of the Babylonian administration, seemingly is not useful to identify

29 No. 40 brick inscription according to Walker 1981.

with a single entity, it should be pointed out here that with Bīt-zazzaku again exists a possible identifier within the Murašû corpus, probably to be searched in the Nippur region.

6 Other textual evidence concerning brick production

Already well-established during the Ur III-period around 2000 BC, brick production was name giving for the third month of the year, the summer month of May/June (Sum. sig4 u5-šub-ba-ga-gar, "the month the brick is placed in the brick mold", Akk. *Simānu, written* ^{iti}*sig4*).[30]

According to the textual evidence, brick production was often outsourced by the temples as obligations by its prebendaries, best documented for the Ezida temple at Borsippa (16 km south-southwest of Babylon, 88 km west-northwest of Nippur) and Eanna temple at Uruk (95 km south-southwest of Nippur).[31] At the former the title of *bēl-agurri* (Akk. lord of the brick) is once mentioned in connection to a *bīt-šutummi,* workshop (in the temple).[32]

Proof of institutional brick production is sparse and probably related to preparation for certain renovation work at the temple itself. Rituals in connection with the king are known from the Neo-Assyrian period of the third month (Simānu)[33] and from Uruk comes the following evidence:

> The festival on the 9th of the month at the Eanna was a religious rite marking the onset of brick making. The goddess Askajaitu(?) left her chapel and was then served a meal. A rite was performed at the kiln where bricks were baked, eight sheep were sacrificed at the entrances to the Eanna, and then another rite occurred at the kiln. (Cohen 1993, 315).

7 Further considerations concerning the construction program of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar II and its Nachleben

Remarkable concerning the reception history of Neo-Babylonian Empire is that this building program made it into our modern cultural memory via the account of *Genesis* (11:4–9), concerning the building of the Tower of Babel which was depicted by multitude of artists, best known are the works of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Vienna, and Rotterdam

30 Cohen 1993, 92–95; 314–315. See also Salonen 1972, 94.

31 Kleber 2008, 102–198; Waerzeggers 2010, 337–343; Jursa 261–264; on the transport of bitumen and bricks see Ibid. 148–150. Prebendaries of the temple had also obligation to produce bricks, sometime even from such professions as brewers etc.

32 Kleber 2008, 345. Concerning such workshops in 3rd to 2nd century BC Bīt Reš at Uruk see Baker 2013.

33 Cohen 1993, 314.

ca. 1565) and Athanasius Kirchner (1679).[34] A not so often commented version is the view of Babylon by Johann Fischer von Erlach (1721), reminding his plans for the royal summer residence Schönbrunn, Vienna probably inspired by Persepolis.[35]

The main consequence of the *Genesis* story is the dispersal of the people.[36] Once assembled in one city, engaged in building one project together, they were dispersed all over the earth or over the Babylonian or even Persian Empire. Could this be an *aition* which tries to explain the situation all over the Babylonian countryside, composed of people from such distant places as Egypt, Anatolia, and even India with different tongues?[37] Is this a mourning for better times when all the (deported) people were engaged in the project of establishing a new splendor for Babylon?[38] Or is it to be seen as a later plea for a less complicated situation when there are people dispersed all over rural Babylonia? This would be especially true for the time after the brutal elimination of the rebellions, which spread out from Northern Babylonian cities such as Sippar and Babylon until the reign of Xerxes in 484 BC which ended the Long 6th century. As the elites were exchanged in such cities like Babylon and Uruk, afterwards it was much more difficult to start another comparable rebellion.[39] Was this partly due also because communication became so complicated? Another imprint of this decisive moment is the shift of rural settlements towards the *ḫadru/ḫatru*-system of different ethnic groups and professions which is documented in the Murašû archive in the latter part of the 5th century BC and not yet in the Al-Yahudu related texts?[40]

8 Conclusions

The stamped bricks encountered in the region 18–19 km to the east-southeast of Nippur opened the possibility to elaborate on the phenomenon of the wide geographic spread of such bricks, especially south of the former capital city of Babylon itself. Rural brick production probably could solve some questions concerning this wide area of occurrence.

Furthermore, the thought of large-scale mining and further processing or recycling of burnt bricks seems to be bewildering. But gaining a better understanding of such a process of recycling could lead to a better understanding to what proportion ancient remains such as burnt brickwork, including temples and ziggurats, survived until nowadays.

34 The latter acquired Nebuchadnezzar bricks from Babylon via Pietro della Valle (Devecchi 2022).

35 Liverani 2016, 15 (Fig. 3). The model for Schönbrunn seems to have been Persepolis (personal communication with Florian Schwarz, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna).

36 See also Berlejung 2016.

37 See for example the different *ḫaṭru/ḫadru* organizations listed in Stolper 1985. Concerning Judeans and other West Semites see Pearce and Wunsch 2015; Wunsch 2022.

38 In a similar direction goes Berlejung 2016. See also already Uehlinger 1990 with a more political, anti-imperial reading.

39 Stolper 1985. Waerzeggers 2018 (see there for further references).

40 As late survival of this phenomenon could be seen the "haṭru of Shamash", better known as Hatra. Kubiak-Schneider 2022. See also the contribution by Ilaria Bucci in this volume.

Superficially, the spread of Nebuchadnezzar II bricks from Babylon into the countryside appears to be the archaeological pendant to the scattering of the people all over the earth in *Genesis*.

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